Initial accreditation

The registered institutions for higher education, the institutions for post-initial education, scientific research and academic services, the Faculty for Protestant Theology in Brussels, and the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Heverlee are periodically held to account regarding the quality of their programmes. New programmes are first subjected to initial accreditation, a procedure to assess their potential quality.

Do you represent a recognised university or university college? Then you need to follow another procedure.

Do you represent a non-recognised institution? Then you need to follow another procedure.

GENERAL INFO

Initial accreditation involves an (ex ante) assessment of the potential quality of a new programme. A new programme is a programme that the applicant institution has not previously registered on the Higher Education Register. NVAO bases its initial accreditation decision on an assessment of the potential programme quality by a panel of independent experts.

The quality of a programme is demonstrated on the basis of eight quality features. In addition, the assessment panel verifies how the programme is involving, on the one hand, internal and external stakeholders, and on the other, external and independent peers and experts.

If applicable, the panel verifies whether the programme meets the regulations with respect to the admission of graduates to corresponding offices or professions.

Once the assessment report by the panel has been endorsed, NVAO will take an accreditation decision (either positive or negative). A quality deficit must be explicitly substantiated by reference to a condition or multiple conditions that must be satisfied in order to remedy the deficit.

The assessment procedure is coordinated by NVAO.

STEPS

1

PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS (OPTIONAL)

No later than three months before the stipulated deadline for submission of the application dossier

In the build-up to the official application, the programme (institution) may conduct preliminary consultations with NVAO, up to three months before...

In the build-up to the official application, the programme (institution) may conduct preliminary consultations with NVAO, up to three months before the stipulated submission date of the application dossier, to confer on the timing and steps in the procedure, the profile of the assessment panel and the combination of expertise commanded by the members, the structure of the Information Dossier and the documents to be submitted, and the substantiation of the site visit.

2

INFORMATION DOSSIER

The programme draws up an Information Dossier that provides the panel with insight into what the new

programme is aiming for, how it intends to rea...
The programme draws up an Information Dossier that provides the panel with insight into what the new programme is aiming for, how it intends to realise its aims, how the realisation of such aims is verified. and how the programme intends to invest in continuous quality development. Attention is paid to the context within which the new programme will be taught, to the manner in which internal and external stakeholders, peers, and experts have been involved in the creation of the programme, and to the manner in which such involvement will be ensured in the future. If so applicable, the report refers to relevant regulations regarding the admission of graduates to certain offices or professions.

3 APPLICATION

The assessment procedure commences on the day on which NVAO receives an application for initial accreditation. Statutory registered institutions mu...
The assessment procedure commences on the day on which NVAO receives an application for initial accreditation. Statutory registered institutions must submit their applications by no later than fifteen days after receipt of a positive conclusion from the Higher Education Council or the Flemish Government regarding their macro-efficiency, or after expiry of the timeframe within which the Flemish Government is required to give such a conclusion. The application is submitted via the digital application form (see tab Submission of Applications); it comprises an application letter signed by the board of the institution, and the Information Dossier. Applications may be withdrawn at any time. NVAO may submit applications from registered institutions to the Higher Education Council for a relevance check. The Higher Education Council performs a relevance check to verify the social relevance of the programme. Upon a negative conclusion by the Higher Education Council, the application is irrevocably dismissed.

4 VERIFICATION OF ADMISSIBILITY OF THE APPLICATION

Notification regarding admissibility no later than 15 calendar days after receipt of the application
NVAO will check the admissibility of the application. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a tim...
NVAO will check the admissibility of the application. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a timeframe of fifteen calendar days. NVAO may submit applications from registered institutions to the Higher Education Council for a relevance check. Upon a negative conclusion by the Higher Education Council, the application is irrevocably dismissed.

5 COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The quality assurance system of Flanders revolves around peer review. An assessment panel comprises a minimum of four experts, among whom is a stud...
The quality assurance system of Flanders revolves around peer review. An assessment panel comprises a minimum of four experts, among whom is a student; it is supported by an NVAO process coordinator and possibly an external secretary. The latter two do not sit on the panel. In order to be able to take the context of the institution into account, NVAO always involves the programme (institution) in the composition of a panel. In order to warrant an objective and fair assessment, the panel must be able to work independently of the programme. This means that over the five years prior to the appointment of the panel, its members must not have had any connections or ties with the institution that is providing the programme. All the panel members, the secretary, and the process coordinator must sign a code of deontology. NVAO informs the institution regarding the panel composition. The institution has the right to lodge a substantiated appeal to the panel composition within a timeframe of fifteen calendar days. In addition, the institution is required to inform NVAO, within that same timeframe, of any information it has regarding the expertise and independence of panel members.

6

SITE VISIT

The panel is allowed a minimum period of six weeks to peruse the Information Dossier and the related documents. NVAO schedules the site visit in co...

The panel is allowed a minimum period of six weeks to peruse the Information Dossier and the related documents. NVAO schedules the site visit in consultation with the programme (institution). Each site visit is coordinated with the panel chair. As a rule, the site visit takes a full day and is preceded by preliminary panel consultations. The schedule takes maximum account of the Information Dossier that the programme has prepared. The panel substantiates the schedule on the basis of a proposal by NVAO and discusses it with the programme (institution). Once the schedule has been finalised, the programme may indicate the positions for which it is proposing discussion partners. Participants may take part in multiple interviews.

7

ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT

In its assessment report, the panel advises NVAO on the accreditation decision to be taken. Its recommendations are based on the assessment scale a...

In its assessment report, the panel advises NVAO on the accreditation decision to be taken. Its recommendations are based on the assessment scale and assessment rules as set out in the assessment framework. The draft assessment report is forwarded to NVAO within four weeks after the site visit. NVAO assesses the internal consistency of the report and the feasibility of the recommendations; if need be, it will suggest adjustments to the panel to clarify the findings or enhance the substantiation of the recommendations. Ownership of the assessment report remains vested with the panel. NVAO forwards the draft assessment report to the institution. The board of the institution is given a term of fifteen calendar days to formulate comments. Wherever necessary, the drafts are amended, whereupon the assessment report is definitively endorsed by the panel. The panel is obliged to respond in writing to the board of the institution regarding any factual inaccuracies identified.

8

DECISION BY NVAO

6 months after receipt of the application (8 months in the event of a relevance check)

On the basis of the assessment report by the panel, NVAO takes an initial accreditation decision in accordance with the assessment scale and assess...

On the basis of the assessment report by the panel, NVAO takes an initial accreditation decision in accordance with the assessment scale and assessment rules in the assessment framework. The approved draft decision and the underlying report are forwarded to the institution, whereupon the board of the institution is allowed a term of fifteen calendar days to lodge an appeal to NVAO. If no appeal is lodged within the stipulated timeframe, the decision is final. The board of an institution may withdraw an initial application before receipt of the draft initial accreditation decision and the underlying assessment report. Following the decision-making procedure, NVAO will publish the decision and the underlying assessment report on its website and forward both documents to the Education Minister of Flanders.

9

DECISION BY THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT

Within 30 calendar days after dispatch of the final initial accreditation decision

The Flemish Government ultimately takes a decision on the recognition of a new programme. Such a decision will be taken within a timeframe of 30 ca...

The Flemish Government ultimately takes a decision on the recognition of a new programme. Such a decision will be taken within a timeframe of 30 calendar days after dispatch of the final initial accreditation decision.

RATES

Once the application has been found admissible, the institution will receive a request for full payment of the cost price of the initial accreditation procedure. The fee applicable to this procedure is fixed by the Education Minister of Flanders. It covers the costs entailed in the work performed by the panel members (remuneration, travel expenses, hotel accommodation, et cetera), which are paid by NVAO.

The rate for an initial accreditation is:

Statutory recognised institutions	EUR 12.967
Other registered institutions, other than universities and university colleges	EUR 25.934
European Approach	EUR 17.961

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