

Initial Accreditation

Institutions that are recognised by the Dutch Minister of Education, Science and Culture are eligible for initial accreditation of their programmes.

GENERAL INFO

The NVAO assessment takes place via a "limited framework for initial accreditation" or "extensive framework for initial accreditation". If the institution has an institutional audit, new programmes are assessed through the "limited framework for initial accreditation" (this does not apply to candidate-legal entities for higher education).

At the same time programmes can submit an application for macro efficiency of higher education to [CDHO](#) (in Dutch: Commissie Doelmatigheid Hoger Onderwijs) (this procedure is not applicable to private higher education institutions, recognised private higher education institutions and programmes within publicly funded institutions that do not require public funding for the programme). The risk of a negative efficiency advice while the NVAO-procedure runs (with the associated cost) remains.

Institutions that do not have a positive decision for the institutional audit a mid-term assessment of the new programme is necessary after three years (WHW, article 5a.10a, paragraph 4).

The accreditation term for an initial accreditation assessment takes up to six years. The NVAO may decide to issue a positive decision "with conditions" of up to two years.

NVAO handles the initial accreditation application within six months. Upon receipt of the draft decision by the NVAO, the institution may appeal. When the decision about the new programme is positive, the institution can register the programme in the official national higher education register (in Dutch: Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs - CROHO).

STEPS

1

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION

The institution applies to NVAO for initial accreditation of the new programme. The application comprises an information dossier structured in acco...

The institution applies to NVAO for initial accreditation of the new programme. The application comprises an information dossier structured in accordance with the standards of the assessment framework. Institutions holding a positive or conditionally positive institutional audit decision may avail themselves of the framework for limited programme assessments; other institutions must use the extensive framework. The information dossier is a self-contained document comprising a maximum of 15 pages for the limited framework or a maximum of 20 pages for the extensive framework, in both cases excluding appendices. The information dossier and the appendices provide the panel with a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes for the entire programme, the set-up of the curriculum, the draft teaching and examination regulations, the learning environment, the learning assessment, and the composition of the staff team that is going to teach the programme. With respect to the first 60 ECs of the programme, full information on the content of the programme and the learning assessment must be available (as a minimum, in draft form). In addition, tests must have been elaborated for several components. The programme must provide insight into the methods it intends to employ to assess achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the end of the curriculum. When applying for initial accreditation, institutions are required to list all the specialisations, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the programme in question. Courses of study that have

not been reported will not be covered by the accreditation.

2

REGISTRATION AND APPOINTMENT OF PROCESS COORDINATOR

Upon receiving the application, NVAO sends an acknowledgement of receipt and an invoice to the contact person of the institution. NVAO appoints a p...

Upon receiving the application, NVAO sends an acknowledgement of receipt and an invoice to the contact person of the institution. NVAO appoints a process coordinator to supervise the initial accreditation procedure and liaise between the institution, panel members, and NVAO. The process coordinator verifies whether the dossier is complete and requests any missing information.

3

PANEL COMPOSITION & SCHEDULING DATE FOR SITE VISIT

If the dossier meets all the formal requirements, the process coordinator convenes a panel of independent experts in accordance with the NVAO requi...

If the dossier meets all the formal requirements, the process coordinator convenes a panel of independent experts in accordance with the NVAO requirements. As a rule, a panel consists of four members, one of whom is a student. The institution may suggest potential panel members. The panel is assisted by a secretary and the process coordinator, who formally do not sit on the panel. The process coordinator keeps in touch with the institution regarding the panel composition and submits the list to the Board of NVAO for approval. Following approval, the panel members receive the information dossier and the associated documents in order to prepare for the site visit.

4

SITE VISIT

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In consultation with the institution and the panel, the process coordinator sets a date for the site visit and substantiates the schedule. During the site visit, the panel interviews several stakeholders of the programme. At the end of the visit, the panel formulates a provisional conclusion (positive, conditionally positive or negative).

5

ADVISORY REPORT

Following the site visit, the panel secretary draws up an advisory report comprising the findings, considerations, and conclusions of the panel. Up...

Following the site visit, the panel secretary draws up an advisory report comprising the findings, considerations, and conclusions of the panel. Upon approval of the panel members, the process coordinator forwards the draft report to the institution in order to check for any factual inaccuracies. Following the response by the institution, the panel chair will endorse the final report and submit the report to NVAO.

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DECISION-MAKING

NVAO takes its decision on the basis of the panel advisory report. The institution receives the intended decision and is given the opportunity to r...

NVAO takes its decision on the basis of the panel advisory report. The institution receives the intended decision and is given the opportunity to respond. Subsequently, NVAO takes a final decision. NVAO publishes the decision and the assessment report on its website.

NEXT STEPS

Following a positive or conditionally positive outcome of the initial accreditation procedure, the institution presents the new programme to the go...

Following a positive or conditionally positive outcome of the initial accreditation procedure, the institution presents the new programme to the governmental implementation agency for the education sector (DUO) in order for the programme to be registered on the Central Register of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO). Following a conditionally positive conclusion regarding the assessment, the programme must have the conditions assessed by a panel within the timeframe stipulated. If the assessment of the conditions turns out positive, NVAO will grant initial accreditation. If the re-assessment shows that the programme fails to satisfy the conditions, NVAO will decide to refuse initial accreditation of the new programme. Programmes provided by institutions that do not hold a positive or conditionally positive institutional audit decision must have an additional audit conducted within three years, in order to have the quality achieved and learning assessment in place within the programme reviewed by a panel. If this audit turns out positive, NVAO will grant initial accreditation. If the second audit shows that the programme fails to satisfy the conditions, NVAO will decide to refuse initial accreditation of the new programme.

RATES

In 2025 NVAO charges 24,000 euros for an initial accreditation assessment. If the assessment includes a distinctive quality feature the costs are 24,000 euros and 24,000 euros for a separate assessment.

Different rates apply to different procedures. The cost for foreign visits or the use of external experts, advice or additional requirements are additionally invoiced.

For deviating procedures, different rates apply. The costs for foreign visits or the engagement of external experts, consultancy, or additional requirements will be billed additionally. There is a residual fee if the application for accreditation of a new program is withdrawn, in 2025:

- prior to panel activities: 4,000 euros
- prior to site visits: 14,000 euros
- after site visits: 24,000 euros

FAQ

Which framework should institutions use in the purview of initial accreditation, the limited or the extensive framework?

Institutions that hold a positive or conditionally positive institutional audit decision may use the framework for limited programme assessments. Other institutions must use the extensive framework. The frameworks are listed at the bottom of this page.

What administrative data must institutions provide when applying for initial accreditation?

When applying for accreditation, institutions are required to list all the specialisations, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the programme in question.

May an institution combine the initial accreditation of a new programme with an application for a distinctive feature for the pr

Yes, it may. See the information on distinctive features provided on this page.

May an institution withdraw an application it has submitted?

An institution is free to withdraw its application at any time during the assessment procedure, up until the day on which NVAO has taken a final decision in the manner stipulated in the General Administrative Law Act. Under the European Standards and Guidelines, NVAO is required to publish all the assessment reports, including those holding a negative conclusion. The administrative process commences upon the panel chair's submission of the advisory report to NVAO. In all cases, this leads to publication of the advisory report. Should an institution withdraw its application before the panel chair submits the advisory report to NVAO, then NVAO will not publish the report.

How are panels prepared for the assessment?

Panel chairs are trained in accordance with the NVAO requirements. During preparatory consultations, the process coordinator explains the assessment framework, the assessment procedure, and the attitude expected of panel members during the interviews. Furthermore, the process coordinator ensures calibration within the panel by going over the interpretation of the standards, conclusions, and assessment rules.

Prior to the consultations, the panel reads the information dossier submitted by the programme. During the consultations, the panel members share their first impressions, formulate questions for the site visit, and agree on their approach to the site visit.

How do panels form judgements?

Within the panel, judgements are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. Equal justice is done to the various perspectives of quality represented on the panel, including the student perspective. In its judgements, the panel strives for consensus.

May an application for initial accreditation to NVAO be submitted concurrently with an application for a macro-efficiency check

Yes, institutions are free to have programmes accredited by NVAO while simultaneously applying to the CDHO for a macro-efficiency decision. However, this entails the risk of a negative efficiency recommendation while the NVAO procedure is already under way (with the associated costs).

The CDHO and NVAO both review the name selected for the intended programme. What is the difference?

The CDHO compares the proposed name of the programme to the names commonly borne by similar programmes in the sector. The outcome of this comparison is set down in the recommendation to the Minister of Education. In the initial accreditation procedure, NVAO subsequently verifies whether the name corresponds to that of similar programmes, taking account of the CDHO recommendation. NVAO further assesses whether the name of the intended programme properly covers its contents. Ergo, the CDHO advises on the chosen name, while the ultimate decision is up to NVAO.

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