



NVAO • NETHERLANDS

# ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION SYSTEM OF THE NETHERLANDS



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## Introduction

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) is the body entrusted with handling accreditation for higher education in the Netherlands. NVAO is responsible for accrediting Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in higher profession-oriented education and academic education. It also conducts institutional audits to assess higher education institutions, on the basis of an accreditation framework.

That accreditation framework sets out the standards and rules for a positive institutional audit decision, initial accreditation, accreditation of an existing programme and the distinctive feature of "small-scale and intensive education". The framework also describes what requirements panels for these assessments must satisfy, and how external assessments for programmes are scheduled. The framework gives further shape to the quality aspects presented in the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*), while also aligning with the arrangements at the European level about organising quality assurance in higher education, as laid down in the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The accreditation framework, which continues along the same course as the frameworks that NVAO drew up in 2016 and 2018, is based on confidence in the proven high quality of higher education in the Netherlands. As such, the framework is built around the concept that teachers, students and management have ownership of the quality of the education. Although the criteria for accreditation are the same as in previous frameworks, the present framework contains two important changes.

1. The framework distinguishes between programmes at institutions with and without a positive institutional audit decision. This distinction takes the following shape: the standards for intended and achieved learning outcomes, learning environment and student assessment are the same for all programmes. In addition, programmes of institutions without a positive institutional audit decision are assessed for two further standards, as well as a number of other aspects in standards 1 and 2. This set-up helps to make the assessments more consistent;
2. The present framework only addresses the quality standards for programmes and institutions, with general outlines of the procedures for applying for the various assessments and how they are conducted. NVAO will establish an implementation policy to define the procedures in further detail.

The institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their programmes, and the framework is based on respect for their autonomy. Each assessment takes as its point of reference the institution or programme's vision and goals, which are not subject to an assessment of their merits.

Under the framework, institutions have the option of assessing existing programmes for themselves, by putting together a panel, seeking out a secretary and obtaining NVAO's approval.

To create this framework, NVAO consulted the umbrella organisations for publicly and privately funded institutions, quality assessment agencies, student organisations and employer organisations.

# 1 Panel composition

## Introduction

All assessments described in the present framework are performed by a committee of experts as defined by law (section 5.2(2)(b) and (c) of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act). These experts must be impartial peers who possess relevant expertise. The accreditation framework refers to these committees as 'panels'. Every panel includes one student member.

Panels are assisted by an impartial secretary who also possesses the expertise described in this framework. Assessments (and extensive assessments) for new programmes and institutional audits are overseen by a process coordinator from NVAO to ensure that the correct procedures are followed and that the opinion is reached in accordance with the framework. The process coordinator handles the communications between the panel and the institution. The reports on the assessments are drawn up by an impartial secretary.

The panel's chair will receive training from NVAO or from the organisation or adviser coordinating the assessment. Before the site visit, the panel members receive instructions from the process coordinator or the secretary about the framework and the assessment procedure, the panel's duties and what attitude is expected from the panel members during the assessment.

### 1.1 Procedure for panel approval

Panels for institutional audits and assessments (and extensive assessments) of new programmes are put together by NVAO. For assessments of existing programmes, for interim audits after three years after initial accreditation and for assessments to determine whether conditions have been satisfied, NVAO will review the panel composition and secretary proposed by the institution.

Institutions must apply to NVAO for approval of the panel composition and secretary, describing and explaining what expertise the panel members possess. The application, including statements of impartiality from the panel members and the secretary, must be submitted to NVAO in sufficient time before the assessment is scheduled to take place. NVAO will establish a deadline.

### 1.2 Impartiality requirements

The impartiality requirements are the same for all panel members and secretaries, namely:

- during the five years preceding the assessment, they may not have had any direct or indirect ties with the institution or programme that they are assessing that could create a conflict of interests, or the appearance of one;
- they may not be employed by the organisation arranging the assessment, whether or not this is at the institution's request or instruction, and they may not have any business interests in that organisation;
- during the five years preceding the assessment, they may not have carried out any work for the benefit of the programme or institution under assessment that falls within the scope of the assessment.

Secretaries (but not panel members) may be employed by the organisation arranging the assessment.

#### Assessment by NVAO

NVAO is responsible for assessing the impartiality of panel members, as part of the procedure for approving panels for existing programmes. NVAO uses information supplied by the panel members, secretaries and institutions involved for this purpose. Panel members and secretaries

must confirm that they satisfy the impartiality requirements, and disclose any other matters that might affect their impartiality.

When NVAO appoints panel members and a secretary for an institutional audit or an assessment (or extensive assessment) of a new programme, it asks them to confirm before their appointment that they satisfy the impartiality requirements. It also asks them to disclose any other matters that might affect their impartiality, and asks the institution in question to disclose any matters that could affect the situation.

Using this approach, NVAO assesses whether sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure that the panel as a whole and the secretary will be impartial in carrying out their task.

### 1.3 Expertise requirements

#### Panels for institutional audits

The peers for institutional audits must be authorities at the management level or in higher education development, audit experts or representational of the societal sphere. Collectively, the panel must possess the following expertise:

- management expertise;
- higher education expertise, preferably including with regard to developments outside the Netherlands;
- expertise with quality assurance system design and effectiveness;
- recent experience in the societal sphere (possibly at the international level) or the professional field in which the institution operates;
- recent experience as a higher education student.

The panel must have a maximum of five members, including at least one student member.

#### Panels for programme assessments

The peers for programme assessments must be impartial and authorities in their disciplines. Collectively they must possess the following expertise:

- up-to-date understanding of the discipline in question;
- extensive and recent experience with teaching and student assessment at the same type of education (higher profession-oriented/academic education, Associate/Bachelor's/Master's degree);
- ability to compare where the programme stands in an international perspective;
- recent experience in the professional field (possibly at the international level) of the discipline;
- experience with peer reviews in higher education;
- recent experience as a higher education student;
- where appropriate: understanding of a specific didactic concept;
- where appropriate: expertise relating to the distinctive feature requested.

The panel must consist of at least four members. At least one panel member must be a higher education student.

## Secretaries

The secretary has the following expertise:

- has thorough knowledge of the accreditation framework and of the rules and guidelines applicable to the assessment of higher education programmes;
- is able to monitor and supervise the process of assessment and adjudication in accordance with the framework, including:
  - o pre-consultation of the panel;
  - o the calibration of the panel regarding the interpretation of the standards, decision rules and judgements in the accreditation framework;
  - o the assessment of achieved learning outcomes in accordance with the guidelines provided by NVAO for this purpose;
- is able to report on assessments in a formally correct and readable way for a wide audience.

The secretary will have to demonstrate periodically that he/she is competent and skilled in monitoring and supervising review processes, has a good knowledge of the accreditation framework and prepares high-quality reports.

## 2 Initial accreditation

### Introduction

An institution seeking initial accreditation should apply to NVAO for an assessment of the new programme. This 'plan' assessment involves a panel of impartial experts assessing a plan for the programme that contains a reasonable level of detail. The plan should provide sufficient information for the panel to assess whether the programme meets the basic standard of quality. In its role as 'gatekeeper' for the system of accredited higher education, NVAO assumes responsibility for putting together the panel to assess the new programme and for coordinating the assessment.

Once the assessment is complete, including a site visit, the panel will draft an advisory report, expressing and explaining an opinion on each standard, based on the findings from the assessment. The panel's report will also set out and explain the panel's final opinion. If the outcome of the assessment for the new programme is positive, this will result in initial accreditation, which remains valid for six years. NVAO may attach conditions to the initial accreditation. If it does, NVAO will give the programme a deadline for demonstrating that it satisfies those conditions, or else the accreditation might be revoked.

### 2.1 Assessment framework

#### Intended learning outcomes

*Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.*

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

*Additional aspects for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision*

The institutional audit covers the aspects described below. As such, assessments of programmes at an institution without a positive institutional audit decision need to include these aspects as well:

- The principles for how the programme is organised must match the institution's vision on education and its profile.
- The intended learning outcomes must be evaluated periodically.

#### Teaching-learning environment

*Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.*

The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach).



If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name. The teaching staff must have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching.

Services and facilities are not assessed, unless they have been set up specifically for the programme concerned.

This means that every programme, at institutions both with and without a positive institutional audit decision, will be assessed for the following aspects:

- The programme's admission requirements must be realistic relative to the intended learning outcomes.
- Students must be given appropriate guidance and support. The information provided by the programme must be sufficient.
- The learning environment must be designed to make the education easier to access and study, including for students with functional disabilities.

*Additional aspects for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision*

The institutional audit covers the aspects described below. As such, assessments of programmes at an institution without a positive institutional audit decision need to include these aspects as well:

- The learning environment must reflect the institution's vision on education.
- The workforce must be sufficiently large.
- If the programme is taught in another language than Dutch, the human resources policy must make accommodation for teachers to teach in that language.

## Student assessment

*Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.*

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes. The Board of Examiners carries out its legal duties and exercises its legal powers.

## Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

### Achieved learning outcomes

As a rule, standard 4 is not addressed in an initial accreditation assessment. The panel will only assess this standard if, in the opinion of NVAO, the procedure involves an existing programme and final projects are available to be assessed.

*Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.*

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in postgraduate programmes.

## 2.2 Additional standards for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision

If an institution does not have a positive institutional audit decision, the panel will also assess standards 5 and 6:

### Facilities

*Standard 5: The accommodation and material facilities are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.*

The accommodation of the programme and the facilities are in keeping with the intended learning outcomes and the teaching-learning environment.

### Quality assurance

*Standard 6: The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.*

The programme organises effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Existing programmes implement appropriate improvements based on the results of the previous assessment. They initiate appropriate evaluation and measurement activities to that end. The outcomes of this evaluation demonstrably constitute the basis for development and improvement. Within the programme, those responsible are held to account regarding the extent to which the programme contributes to the attainment of the institution's strategic goals. Quality assurance ensures the achievement of the intended learning results. The programme committee, examination board, staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field are actively involved in the programme's internal quality assurance. The programme's design processes, its recognition, and its quality assurance are in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines. The programme publishes accurate, reliable information regarding its quality, which is easily accessible to the target groups.

## 2.3 Assessment after three years

A new programme taught by an institution without a positive institutional audit decision, without any actual education being taught, must have the two following quality aspects assessed three years after initial accreditation:

- the level achieved, with a view to what is desirable and customary from an international perspective;
- the validity of the assessment, testing, and examination of the students.

No more than three years after the decision to award the initial accreditation, the institution must provide NVAO with the advisory report for that assessment. Responsibility for organising the assessment rests with the institution. In principle, the three-year assessment should be conducted by the same panel that conducted the assessment of the new programme. However, the institution must present the panel to NVAO for its approval. The assessment is based on interim exams or final projects that provide evidence of what level has been achieved.

## 2.4 Programme name and suffix to the degree

The panel's report on the assessment of the new programme advises NVAO:

- whether the name of the programme provides sufficient information about the material covered by the programme, and aligns with common practices in the sector where the programme belongs and within the preferred external assessment group; and

- (for higher profession-oriented education programmes:) whether the suffix to the degree is recognisable at the international level, based on a reference list that is adopted by Ministerial Decree.

NVAO will decide separately on these matters.

## 2.5 Judgement and rules for reaching a decision

<b>Judgement per standard</b>	
The panel scores each standard:	
Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Does not meet the standard:	The programme fails to meet the generic quality standard.
<b>Generic quality:</b>	<i>The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme</i>

<b>For institutions with a positive institutional audit decision</b>	
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The programme meets all the standards
Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Negative:	<p><i>In the following situations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The programme does not meet one or more standards;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets standard 1;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets one to two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets three or more standards.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional assessment rules regarding conditions</b>	
<p>A score of "partially meets the standard" means that an institution meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.</p> <p>When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the institution to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative".</p> <p>NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative"</p>	

<b>For institutions without a positive institutional audit decision</b>	
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The programme meets all the standards
Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of three standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Negative:	<i>In the following situations:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The programme does not meet one or more standards;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets standard 1;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets one to three standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets four or more standards.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional assessment rules regarding conditions</b>	
<p>A score of “partially meets the standard” means that an institution meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.</p> <p>When presenting a final conclusion of “conditionally positive”, a panel must review whether it is feasible for the institution to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be “negative”.</p> <p>NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of “negative”</p>	

## 2.6 Application procedure

The institution should apply to NVAO to assess the new programme. The application should include an information file that follows the standards of the assessment framework. This file must be a self-contained document that is not too large. NVAO has guidelines for the size and contents of the file. They distinguish between programmes of institutions with and without a positive institutional audit decision.

The information file and its appendices should give the panel a clear understanding of the plan for the programme, describing what the intended learning outcomes are for the entire programme and how the curriculum is set up, plus draft education and examination regulations, the learning environment, student assessment and the composition of the team of teachers that will teach the programme. Draft versions should be provided of all information concerning the material covered in the first 60 EC of the programme. Student assessments should be detailed for several of its parts. The programme should explain how it will assess the intended learning outcomes at the end of the course.

The information file must contain the institution's explanation for the choice of language for the programme, with reference to what the professional field and the discipline demand in terms of the material covered by the programme from a regional, national and international perspective. If the programme is taught entirely in another language than Dutch, the institution should address why the decision to teach the education in a different language is necessary to realise the

intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel's advisory report will indicate whether it considers this explanation justified.

The assessment of the new programme and the initial accreditation that is awarded if the assessment is successful cover the entire programme, including every mode of study (full-time, part-time and apprenticeship), subject area and specialisation, and every location where the programme is taught. Where applicable, the assessment of the new programme will also address whether the programme is compliant with the professional requirements, including those imposed by law. The institution's application and information file should provide a comprehensive understanding of each of these aspects of the programme.

## 3 Extensive assessment of a new programme

### Introduction

A legal entity that wishes to enter the system of accredited higher education and teach an accredited programme must obtain recognition as a private institution from the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The procedure for obtaining that recognition comprises two elements:

- an extensive assessment by NVAO of a new Bachelor's or Master's programme offered by the legal entity;
- the Ministry's admission test, which includes an audit by the Inspectorate of Education.

The present framework only describes the extensive assessment of a new programme.

The extensive assessment cannot be based on a new Associate degree programme.

The extensive assessment of a new programme includes a site visit. Once the panel has completed the assessment, it will prepare an advisory report for NVAO that presents judgements on each of the standards, plus the panel's final opinion and the reasons for that opinion. That report then forms the basis for NVAO's decision. If and when the extensive assessment of the new programme yields a positive outcome, the institution may apply to the Ministry for status as a recognised private institution. The programme cannot be registered in CROHO (central register of tertiary education programmes)<sup>1</sup> until the Minister has issued a positive decision.

### 3.1 The framework and rules for reaching a decision

The assessment is not concerned with the plan, but with the standard of quality achieved. NVAO assesses the programme's quality against the framework for existing programmes, including the additional requirements for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision.

The rules for deciding on the extensive assessment of the new programme are as follows. Every standard must be rated satisfactory. The final opinion will be either positive or negative.

<b>Judgement per standard</b>	
<i>The panel scores each standard:</i>	
Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
Does not meet the standard:	The programme fails to meet the generic quality standard.
<b>Generic quality:</b>	<i>The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme</i>
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
Negative:	The programme does not meet one or more standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently called Registratie Instellingen en Opleidingen (Institutions and Programmes Register, or RIO).

## 3.2 Application procedure

The application to NVAO for an extensive assessment of a new programme is part of the procedure for obtaining the status of a recognised private institution. To apply, the institution must put together an information file that is similar to the information needed for self-evaluation of an existing programme, including student input. The file should also include a list of the available final projects or similar products for assessing students against the achieved learning outcomes.

In the file, the institution must explain how the programme satisfies the 'full cycle' requirement: that the education is taught in the Netherlands and that graduates have already completed the programme's entire curriculum that is the subject of the assessment. Only after NVAO has established that the programme satisfies the full cycle requirement will it put together an assessment panel.

The extensive assessment of the new programme and the initial accreditation that is awarded if the assessment is successful cover the entire programme, including every mode of study (full-time, part-time and apprenticeship), subject area and specialisation, and every location where the programme is taught. The extensive assessment of a new programme also considers whether the programme satisfies the relevant professional requirements, including those imposed by law. The institution's application and information file should provide a comprehensive understanding of each of these aspects of the programme.

The information file for the extensive assessment of a new programme must contain the institution's explanation for the choice of language for the programme, with reference to what the professional field and the discipline demand in terms of the material covered by the programme from a regional, national and international perspective. If the programme is taught entirely in another language than Dutch, the institution should address why the decision to teach the education in a different language is necessary to realise the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel's advisory report will indicate whether it considers this explanation justified.

## 4 Accreditation of existing programmes

### Introduction

Existing programmes are subject to an external assessment by a panel of impartial expert peers that has been approved by NVAO. The programme must demonstrate that the education satisfies the standards in actual practice. The assessment is concerned with the standard of quality achieved, and covers the intended learning outcomes, how the curriculum is set up, learning environment, student assessment, the composition of the team of teachers and the achieved learning outcomes. This assessment considers the programme from the perspective of comparison with related programmes.

A site visit will also be conducted as part of the assessment. The panel will give persons involved in the programme the opportunity to disclose in confidence, outside the discussions during the site visit, any matters that they believe might have bearing on the assessment. The schedule for the visit includes, at a minimum, separate sessions with students and teachers. Once the assessment is complete, the panel will draft an advisory report, expressing and explaining its opinion on each standard, based on the findings from the assessment. The panel's report will also set out and explain its final opinion.

NVAO may attach conditions to the accreditation of existing programmes. If it does, NVAO will give the programme a deadline for demonstrating that it satisfies those conditions, or else NVAO might revoke the accreditation.

The panel will also have a development dialogue with the programme, to discuss potential improvements from the perspective of development. The panel will record the outcomes of the development dialogue in a separate document that is not included in the accreditation application. Disclosure of that document is subject to legal requirements.

### 4.1 Assessment framework

#### Intended learning outcomes

*Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.*

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

#### *Additional aspects for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision*

The institutional audit covers the aspects described below. As such, assessments of programmes at an institution without a positive institutional audit decision need to include these aspects as well:

- The principles for how the programme is organised must match the institution's vision on education and its profile.
- The intended learning outcomes must be evaluated periodically.



## Teaching-learning environment

*Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes*

The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach).

If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name. The teaching staff must have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching.

Services and facilities are not assessed, unless they have been set up specifically for the programme concerned.

This means that every programme, at institutions both with and without a positive institutional audit decision, will be assessed for the following aspects:

- The programme's admission requirements must be realistic relative to the intended learning outcomes.
- Students must be given appropriate guidance and support. The information provided by the programme must be sufficient.
- The learning environment must be designed to make the education easier to access and study, including for students with functional disabilities.

### *Additional aspects for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision*

The institutional audit covers the aspects described below. As such, assessments of programmes at an institution without a positive institutional audit decision need to include these aspects as well:

- The learning environment must reflect the institution's vision on education.
- The workforce must be sufficiently large.
- If the programme is taught in another language than Dutch, the human resources policy must make accommodation for teachers to teach in that language.

## Student assessment

*Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.*

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes. The Board of Examiners carries out its legal duties and exercises its legal powers

## Achieved learning outcomes

*Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.*

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in postgraduate programmes.

## Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

## 4.2 Additional standards for institutions without a positive institutional audit decision

If an institution does not have a positive institutional audit decision, the panel will also assess standards 5 and 6:

### Facilities

*Standard 5: The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.*

The accommodation of the programme and the facilities are in keeping with the intended learning outcomes and the teaching-learning environment.

### Quality assurance

*Standard 6: The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.*

The programme organises effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Existing programmes implement appropriate improvements based on the results of the previous assessment. They initiate appropriate evaluation and measurement activities to that end. The outcomes of this evaluation demonstrably constitute the basis for development and improvement. Within the institution, those responsible are held to account regarding the extent to which the programme contributes to the attainment of the institution's strategic goals. Quality assurance ensures the achievement of the intended learning results. The programme committee, examination board, staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field are actively involved in the programme's internal quality assurance. The programme's design processes, its recognition, and its quality assurance are in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines. The programme publishes accurate, reliable information regarding its quality, which is easily accessible to the target groups.

## 4.3 Judgement and rules for reaching a decision

<b>Judgement per standard</b>	
<i>The panel scores each standard:</i>	
Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Does not meet the standard:	The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.
<i>Generic quality:</i>	<i>The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.</i>

<b>For institutions with a positive institutional audit decision</b>	
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being

	recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Negative:	<p><i>In the following situations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets standard 1</li> <li>- The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets three or more standards.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional assessment rules regarding conditions</b>	
	<p>A score of “partially meets the standard” means that a programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.</p> <p>When presenting a final conclusion of “conditionally positive”, a panel must review whether it is feasible for the programme to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be “negative”.</p> <p>NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of “negative”.</p>

<b>For institutions without a positive institutional audit decision</b>	
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of three standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Negative:	<p><i>In the following situations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The programme fails to meet one or more standards;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets standard 1</li> <li>- The programme partially meets one or three standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;</li> <li>- The programme partially meets four or more standards.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional assessment rules regarding conditions</b>	
	<p>A score of “partially meets the standard” means that a programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.</p> <p>When presenting a final conclusion of “conditionally positive”, a panel must review whether it is feasible for the programme to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be “negative”.</p>

NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of “negative”.
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#### 4.4 Application procedure

For a programme with initial accreditation to obtain accreditation of existing programmes, it must apply to NVAO for accreditation no later than on the submission date for the external assessment group, accompanied by an external assessment report. Programmes that already have accreditation for existing programmes need only submit the external assessment report to NVAO by the submission date.

If, based on the outcome of the external assessment, the panel advises imposing conditions, the institution should include a plan for improvement with the external assessment report, plus the programme committee's advice. If the law does not prescribe a programme committee, the programme should attach the panel's advice on the plan for improvement. In either case, the institution must submit these documents to NVAO by the submission date. The submission date is enforced strictly.

The self-evaluation for the external assessment must contain the institution's explanation for the choice of language for the programme, with reference to what the professional field and the discipline demand in terms of the material covered by the programme from a regional, national and international perspective. If the programme is taught entirely in another language than Dutch, the institution should address why the decision to teach the education in a different language is necessary to realise the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The panel's external assessment report will indicate whether it considers this explanation justified.

Accreditation of an existing programme covers the entire programme, including every mode of study (full-time, part-time and apprenticeship), subject area and specialisation, and every location where the programme is taught. Where applicable, the accreditation of an existing programme will also address whether the programme is compliant with the professional requirements, including those imposed by law. The institution's application and the external assessment report should provide a comprehensive understanding of each of these aspects of the programme.

## 5 Institutional audit

### Introduction

An institutional audit is a periodic external and impartial assessment of the internal quality assurance of the institution's education. The purpose of the audit is to establish whether the internal quality assurance system, in conjunction with the quality culture, provides sufficient safeguards that the institution gives practical shape to its own vision of proper education, and consistently works to develop and improve. The audit is conducted by an external panel of impartial experts, on the basis of peer review.

If the outcome of an institutional audit is positive, NVAO will issue the institution with a positive institutional audit decision. For as long as the positive institutional audit decision remains valid, it entitles the institution to disregard standards 5 and 6 of the framework, and several aspects of standards 1 and 2, for the purposes of initial assessments and assessments of existing programmes.

### 5.1 Assessment framework

#### Philosophy and policy

*Standard 1: The institution has a broadly supported educational philosophy and pursues a corresponding policy focused on the internal quality assurance of its education.*

The institution holds a well-defined view of good education which is shared in all its departments. Teachers and students support this philosophy, and develop it in mutual consultation and in concert with external stakeholders. Periodic coordination with the relevant (changing) environment ensures the topicality of this philosophy. The educational philosophy has been translated into explicit points of departure for quality assurance. In accordance with the ESG, the educational philosophy is student-oriented (student-centred learning).

#### Implementation

*Standard 2: The institution realises its educational philosophy in an effective manner, which is demonstrated by appropriate policy actions and processes, particularly relating to staff, student assessment, services and facilities, and students with a functional impairment.*

The philosophy has been appropriately translated into concrete policy actions and processes. The institution has processes in place for the design, recognition, and quality assurance of its programmes in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines, and demonstrates the effectiveness and application of such processes by means of a track record. Students and staff co-own the policy and contribute to its realisation on the basis of the shared philosophy. This commitment demonstrates how the institution realises its intended quality culture.

Implementation is consistent with the philosophy: staff, student assessment, and services and facilities further the accessibility and practicability of the education provided.

#### Evaluation and monitoring

*Standard 3: The institution systematically evaluates whether the intended policy objectives relating to educational quality are achieved. Relevant stakeholders are involved in this process.*

The institution organises effective feedback that supports the realisation of its policy. To that end, it initiates appropriate evaluation and measurement activities that are stably embedded in the institution. These tools provide insightful information that can be used for the formulation of

desired quality development. The tools comprise a transparent method for identifying and reporting risks, taking action where needed, with a focus on improvement. Reflection on the output forms part of the organisational model, and provides sufficient insight into the effectiveness of the policy implementation in all tiers of the organisation and staff participation.

Since the measurement and evaluation activities revolve around effectiveness, they do not need to be uniform across the entire institution. Students, staff, alumni and experts from the professional field are actively involved in the evaluations. The institution publishes accurate, up-to-date and accessible information regarding the evaluation results.

## Development

*Standard 4: The institution has a focus on development and works systematically on the improvement of its education.*

Feedback and reflection on output constitute the basis for measures targeted at reinforcing, improving, or adjusting policy or its implementation. Following up on measures for improvement is embedded in the organisational structure. The development policy pursued by the institution encourages all the parties concerned to contribute to innovation and quality improvement. Internal and external stakeholders have been informed regarding the developments that are primed on the basis of the evaluation outcomes. The institution pursues continuous improvement, adapts to the (changing) circumstances, and conforms to the expectations of students and employers.

## Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

### 5.2 Panel judgements and assessment rules

<b>Judgement per standard</b>	
<i>The panel scores each standard:</i>	
Meets the standard:	The institution meets the standard;
Partially meets the standard:	The institution meets the standard to a significant extent, but improvements are needed in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Does not meet the standard:	The institution does not meet the standard.
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the institution. In reaching such a conclusion, it observes the following assessment rules:</i>	
Positive:	The institution meets all the standards.
Conditionally positive:	A judgement of “partially meets the standard” for a maximum of two standards, whereby the panel recommends conditions to be imposed (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
Negative:	The institution fails to meet one or more standards and additionally “partially meets” three or more other standards.
<b>Additional assessment rules regarding conditions</b>	
A score of “partially meets the standard” means that an institution meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.	
When presenting a final conclusion of “conditionally positive”, a panel must review whether it is feasible for the institution to have realised improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set	

	<p>down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be “negative”.</p> <p>NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of “negative”.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	
	<p>With respect to each standard, the panel may suggest improvements, which will be stated separately from the substantiation of its judgements in its report.</p>

### 5.3 Application procedure

A positive institutional audit decision remains valid for six years. The institution should apply to NVAO for renewal at least one year before the end of that validity. An institution that does not have a positive institutional audit decision may apply to NVAO for such a decision at any time. An institution may decide for itself whether or not to apply for an institutional audit.

To prepare for the institutional audit, the institution must draw up a limited self-evaluation that describes the institution's strengths and weaknesses. That self-evaluation will then be presented for advice to the institution's co-determination or participation bodies.

NVAO puts together a panel, and discusses the timetable and set-up for the audit with the institution. In principle, the panel will conduct two site visits: one exploratory, and one in-depth. The panel will give persons involved in the institution the opportunity to disclose in confidence, outside the discussions during the site visit, matters that they believe might have bearing on the assessment.

The panel then draws up a report describing its findings and considerations, set off against the standards. The report should present separate judgements on each standard, plus the panel's final opinion with an explanation of that opinion. If the panel advises imposing conditions, the report will describe them explicitly in relation to the relevant standards. That report then forms the basis for NVAO's decision. NVAO may ask the panel for further clarification.

Once NVAO has completed the process of deciding on whether or not to express a positive institutional audit decision, it will contact the institution and the members of the panel to review the procedure.



## 6 Distinctive feature of “small-scale and intensive education”

### Introduction

Subject to certain conditions, a programme that offers small-scale and intensive education, or separate courses within the programme, may adopt a system of student selection and, in combination with that system, charge higher tuition fees than indicated by law. This requires them to first apply to NVAO for the distinctive feature of “small-scale and intensive education” (initial audit). If and when NVAO has awarded this distinctive feature, it will advise the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to grant the programme permission for a system of student selection and for raising the tuition fees.

This permission has an open-ended validity. However, the programme is required to explain once, within six years after the initial audit, whether it has realised the goals in terms of the small-scale and intensive education and has achieved an above-average return (practical test). Every time the programme applies for a new accreditation, it must demonstrate that it still satisfies the criteria for the distinctive feature.

### 6.1 Criteria for the distinctive feature of “small-scale and intensive education”

The criteria have been formulated in broad terms in order to afford the institutions maximum scope for creating a distinct profile based on topics of their own choice.

#### A. Intended learning outcomes

The objectives and intended learning outcomes are aimed at achieving an above-average level in one or more academic disciplines and/or professional practices in the domain concerned. In addition, the programme focuses on the broadening and development of related personal attitudes and skills.

#### B. Curriculum: contents

The curriculum and the extracurricular activities are inextricably bound. Their contents tie in with the intended level and the broadening as formulated in the intended learning outcomes. Students and staff share responsibility for the organisation of the extracurricular activities.

#### C. Curriculum: learning environment

The teaching concept is based on a challenging learning environment, education substantiated in a small-scale and intensive manner, and a learning community of students and staff. The small-scale and intense nature of the education is demonstrated by the level of participation and preparation that is expected from students. The curriculum is structured in such a manner as to ensure nominal study progress by the students, including extracurricular activities.

#### D. Intake

The programme has a sound selection procedure in place, aimed at admitting motivated and academically and/or professionally talented students, in which the criteria include suitability for and interest in the small-scale and intensive educational concept, in combination with extracurricular activities.

#### E. Staff

The number of staff is sufficient in terms of providing small-scale and intensive education, substantiating close contact between staff and students, and providing individual counselling to students outside the educational context. The staff demonstrably command the specific expertise and skills required to achieve the objectives of small-scale and intensive education. The

programme actively monitors that teachers hold the required qualifications and, if necessary, ensures that teachers are trained in these aspects.

## F. Facilities

The programme has its own infrastructure with facilities for small-scale and intensive education and common extra-curricular social activities.

## G. Achieved learning outcomes

The content and the level of the tests and final projects are in line with the level and the broadening as set down in the intended learning outcomes. Graduates are admitted to demanding postgraduate programmes and/or jobs. The success rates are substantially higher than those of other relevant programmes that do not carry the distinctive feature, and are at least on a par with other relevant programmes that have been granted this distinctive feature.

### 6.2 Panel judgements and assessment rules

<b>Judgement per criterion for the initial audit and the practical test</b>	
<i>The panel must express an opinion on each criterion:</i>	
Positive:	All the criteria are scored as “meets the standard”
Negative:	One or more of the criteria are scored as “does not meet the standard”
<b>Additional rules for reaching a decision on the initial audit</b>	
Criterion G is only assessed prospectively.	
<b>Final conclusion</b>	
<i>The panel also recommends, and explains, a weighted final opinion on the distinctive feature, with due observance of the following rules for the decision:</i>	
Positive:	All the criteria are scored as “meets the standard”
Negative:	One or more of the criteria are scored as “does not meet the standard”

### 6.3 Application procedure

Any existing higher education programme or course may apply for the distinctive feature of “small-scale and intensive education”. The application may also be part of the assessment of a new programme. An institution applying for the distinctive feature should explain that it intends to obtain permission from the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to adopt a system of student selection and to charge higher statutory tuition fees.

The audit for the distinctive feature split into three different moments: the entry audit, the practical audit and the renewal of the distinctive feature. The entry audit and the practical audit form the basis for a recommendation to the Minister for granting permission for entry selection and for charging higher tuition fees. Renewal of the distinctive feature is linked directly to NVAO’s reaccreditation of the programme.

Preferably, the distinctive feature should be assessed in the context of an external assessment or an assessment of a new programme. For an existing programme, however, the application may also be assessed separately from the external assessment by a panel of impartial experts.

NVAO imposes further requirements for the composition of panels for assessing the distinctive feature. The panel must include one or more experts possessing experience with previous distinctive feature assessments or possessing other expertise in this area.

## 7 External assessment groups and schedule

Existing programmes are assessed by an NVAO-approved panel of impartial experts. This assessment considers the programme from the perspective of comparison with related programmes. To this end, each programme in the accreditation system is assigned to an external assessment group, based on the following premises:

- The groups are made up of related programmes that are assessed in comparison with each other by a single panel.
- A programme may be treated as a unique programme if the institution can make a good case, based on the material covered by the programme. By way of an exception, a programme may be treated as unique if it is impossible to determine an external assessment group with a suitable submission date (requiring the accreditation to be extended or cut short by more than two years).
- Proposals are coordinated at the national level.

Each external assessment group is assessed by a single panel, on the basis of comparison. To ensure that the panel members bring the necessary impartiality, specific expertise and availability, the composition may vary from programme to programme. However, the composition must show enough overlap between separate programmes to allow a consistent comparison-based assessment.

NVAO sets the deadline by when a report for the following assessment needs to be submitted: the 'submission date'. That date is specified in the accreditation decision.

The board of an institution may apply to NVAO for the composition of an external assessment group to be changed. That application should give the reasons why the group should be changed, as well as evidencing that the change has been discussed with the contemplated external assessment group.

## 8 Publication

The assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands will be published in the Netherlands Government Gazette, after which it will be posted on NVAO's website ([www.nvao.net](http://www.nvao.net)).

## Appendix: abbreviations used

Ad	associate degree programme
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines)
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

