

Systems in motion
NVAO Annual Report 2015
Summary

June 2016

Systems in motion

The accreditation systems of the higher education sectors in Flanders and the Netherlands are in a state of flux. Flanders launched an integrated external quality assurance system in 2015, involving the introduction of the institutional review and substantiating the pilots aimed at giving the institutions autonomy in safeguarding the quality of their programmes. In the Netherlands, debates are ongoing in order to be able to take the system to the next level. In both regions, the focus is on respectful and trust-based relations in order to arrive at robust and authoritative accreditation assessments, while at the same time ensuring the improvement and innovation of the quality of higher education.

The Flemish accreditation system has been further developed by a taskforce set up by Hilde Crevits, Vice Prime Minister of Flanders and Flemish Education Minister, with representatives from universities, university colleges, students, the quality assessment agency of the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges VLUHR-KZ, and NVAO. The proposal was endorsed by the Flemish Parliament in 2015 and subsequently ratified by the Flemish government. The revised Flemish system is based on trust and autonomy, with institutions giving account regarding the quality of their educational policy through an institutional review at the institutional level and a pilot to assess the control exerted by the institutions over the quality assurance of their programmes.

The new assessment method in Flanders has been set up in preparation to a possible future institutional accreditation. At the end of 2017, it will be subjected to a thorough evaluation, which is to constitute the basis for a new accreditation system to come into force in 2020. All the Flemish university colleges and universities have opted for the control they exert over the quality of their programmes to be included in the assessment. Registered institutions do not undergo an institutional review; for these institutions, the programme assessments will be continued.

The transition to institutional accreditation is being prepared through an additional strand in the institutional review, based on a new Quality Code. Institutions opting for this additional strand will be exempted from programme accreditations. Programme accreditations will be maintained for new programmes, programmes already engaged on an improvement period, international cooperatives and institutions not participating in the pilots.

For the new Flemish system, NVAO has opted for the “evaluating approach”. This perspective fosters mutual respect and encourages useful dialogues without losing track of each party’s role. The evaluating approach generates inspiring energy for the continued improvement of quality at all levels. Together with the institutions, NVAO is striving for a reduction of the administrative burden.

In the Netherlands, NVAO also cooperated closely and constructively with institutions, umbrella organisations, student associations, trade unions, and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 2015, in order to jointly proceed to the next phase in the accreditation system.

The point of departure is the advisory report presented in early 2015 by the Accreditation System 3.0 steering group set up by Jet Bussemaker, Minister of Education, Culture and Science, with representatives from the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), the Dutch Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions (NRTO), the student associations, the Education Inspectorate, and NVAO, regarding the development of the accreditation system within the framework of her Strategic Agenda for Higher Education that was presented in the summer of 2015.

“Customised accreditation” will be central in the system to come. In 2015, NVAO embarked on the optimisation of the existing Dutch assessment frameworks in order to cut back the administrative burden. NVAO aims to combine the further development of the accreditation framework with a reduction of the burden and a further differentiation of the set of instruments.

In 2015, NVAO entered into cooperation agreements with the American sector association and accreditation organisation for business schools AACSB International, and the European EFMD management development network, aimed at amalgamating the assessment and accreditation procedures for Dutch and Flemish business schools and economic programmes. This will lead to a substantial reduction of the administrative burden.

For Dutch, Flemish and German joint programmes, a cooperation agreement with the German Akkreditierungsrat was signed in the summer of 2015. NVAO intends to conclude more such international agreements in the year ahead, in particular with the Association of MBAs (AMBA).

In January 2015, NVAO celebrated its tenth anniversary together with its business contacts, during a conference at the Flemish Parliament in Brussels. Day Chair Annelies Beck hosted a panel discussion among prominent representatives of the Flemish, Dutch and international education communities, and conducted an interview with Hilde Crevits, Vice Prime Minister of the Flemish government and Flemish Education Minister, and Jet Bussemaker, Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

In the year under review, Vice Chair Ann Demeulemeester and Board Member Lucien Bollaert both left NVAO. NVAO bade them farewell with receptions in Antwerp and Brussels for the various business contacts. Minister Crevits was the keynote speaker at both gatherings.

NVAO has continued to focus on the Dutch assessment and profiling of research master's programmes and teacher training programmes (training schools, primary school teacher training colleges, and post-graduate teacher training programmes), and has conducted further comparative analyses. At the organisational level, NVAO has reviewed its quality assurance plan of action with a view to reducing procedural timeframes and reinforcing external communication in preparation to its external evaluation in the framework of an ENQA review in 2017.

In the year ahead, NVAO intends to further strengthen the trust in and support of the systems, and promote the new accreditation systems in the international context. It aims to support the “evaluating approach” and the “trust and customisation” principles by employing an authoritative and robust set of instruments, flexible where possible and firm where needed. In addition, it is working on enhancing the accessibility of reports and reinforcing the quality-oriented culture in higher education. The annual report at hand reflects the activities it has undertaken in 2015.

Anne Flierman, Chair
Ann Verreth, Vice-Chair

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Results

NVAO assesses and assures the quality of higher education and promotes the quality-oriented culture within the higher education systems of the Netherlands and Flanders.

Assessment and assurance

A total of 652 Dutch and Flemish applications were processed in 2015, versus 807 in 2014 (see Table 1).

The number of accreditation applications processed in the Netherlands totalled 397 (2014: 646). The number of initial accreditations (new programmes) rose to 68 in the Netherlands (2014: 60).

Flanders saw a rise with respect to both existing and new programmes: 169 accreditations in 2015 versus 74 in the year before. Initial accreditations of new programmes totalled 14 and 12, respectively.

Table 1: Total number of processed applications from the Netherlands and Flanders as of 31 December 2015

	Final total	The Netherlands			Flanders		
		Existing programmes (accreditation)	Institutional audit	New programmes (initial accreditation)	Existing programmes (accreditation)	New programmes (initial accreditation)	
2015	652	397 ¹	4	68	169	14	
2014	807	646 ²	15	60	74	12	
2013	801	515	24	50	206	6	
2012	578	339	5	55	166	13	

Existing programmes in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, 397 accreditation applications were processed (2014: 646), (see Table 2). The majority were assessed as “satisfactory”. Thirteen percent of the cases scored a judgement of “good”.

Seven percent of the programmes were granted an improvement period, which is on a par with preceding years.

¹ Including 73 research master's programmes

² Including 12 research master's programmes

Table 2: Total number of accreditation applications processed in the Netherlands as of 31 December 2015

	Final-total	Sufficient	Good	Excellent	Improve- ment period	Application withdrawn
2015						
Academic higher education						
Publicly funded	212	175	12	-	24	1
Privately funded	-	-	-	-	-	-
Academic higher education overall	212	175	12	-	24	1
Professional higher education						
Publicly funded	171	129	39	-	3	-
Privately funded	14	11	1	-	2	-
Professional higher education overall	185	140	40	-	5	-
2015 total	397	315	52	-	29	1

In addition to the regular accreditation procedures, NVAO focused additional attention on the assessment of teacher training programmes and research master's programmes in the Netherlands in the year under review. Furthermore, NVAO played an active and often co-directive role in the development of the new system of titles in professional higher education; the further demarcation of the assessment clusters; the development of an assessment framework for the teaching specialisations; the flexibilisation experiment; the amendments to the assessment framework of 2014; the framework for associate degrees; and the preparations for the new accreditation system.

In addition, the training for chairs of programme assessment panels was substantiated and a profile for such chairs was set down, in consultation with quality assessment agencies and experts from the education sector.

The year 2015 saw the completion of the accreditation of the Dutch primary school teacher training programmes (PABO) provided by universities of applied sciences, and the post-graduate teacher training programmes (ULO) provided by research universities, as part of the overall accreditation round of teacher training programmes in the period 2014 to 2016. By April 2015, all 24 PABO programmes had been accredited. All the programmes were "up to standard"; nearly one-third of the programmes (7) received a judgement of "good". In July 2015, NVAO published a system-wide analysis of the PABO programmes. This showed that across the board, the development in the exit qualifications has sharpened up the curricula and the assessment procedures.

The summer of 2015 also saw the completion of the accreditation round of the post-graduate teacher training programmes (ULO's). All the ULO programmes scored a judgement of "satisfactory", save those provided by one university. The system-wide analysis of the ULO programmes will be published in the spring of 2016.

In addition, NVAO completed 31 applications from training schools in the year under review, resulting in 29 positive judgements. Two institutions withdrew their applications. In 2016-2017, NVAO and the Education Inspectorate will publish a joint report on all the teacher training programmes. In this report, the NVAO analyses will be supplemented with, among other things, an update of the Inspectorate's view of the education sector.

In 2015, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) terminated its involvement in the assessment of research master's programmes. In consultation with various bodies, including the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), NVAO subsequently initiated the development of new guidelines for the assessment of such programmes.

Table 3 shows that the push for quality in publicly funded professional higher education is bearing fruit: the upward trend is manifest, with double the number of "good" judgements (2015: 22 percent; 2014: 11 percent) and hardly any improvement periods (2015: 3 percent; 2014: 6 percent).

Among the academic programmes, the number of improvement periods granted rose to 11 percent in 2015 (2014: 9 percent). Particular improvement is required among the post-graduate teacher training programmes and the research master's programmes. The number of programmes assessed as "good" fell to six percent (2014: 10 percent).

Table 3: Trend and differentiation in scores in % per sector

	2015	2014
Academic higher education		
Excellent	-	-
Good	6%	10%
Satisfactory	83%	80%
Improvement period	11%	9%
Professional higher education		
Excellent	-	2%
Good	22%	11%
Satisfactory	76%	80%
Improvement period	3%	6%

Existing programmes in Flanders

In Flanders, the number of accreditation applications for existing programmes rose from 77 in 2014 to 169 in the following year (see Table 4). Ten percent of the programmes were granted an improvement period (extension of the validity of the accreditation term); 18 percent of the cases scored a judgement of “good”.

The number of accreditation applications in Flanders will remain this high in 2016. Subsequently – in anticipation of the evaluation of the ongoing pilot by 2017 – only a limited number of accreditation applications will be submitted, considering the new integrated external quality assurance system that was launched in Flanders in 2015. The current accreditations were renewed (for more details, see “Institutional review Flanders”).

Table 4: Total number of accreditation applications processed in Flanders as of 31 December 2015

	Final total	Excellent	Good	Positive	Limited validity
2015					
Academic sector					
Statutory registered institutions	82	-	14	64	4
Registered institutions	4	-	3	-	1
Academic sector overall	86	-	17	64	5
Professional sector					
Statutory registered institutions	81	-	14	56	11
Registered institutions	2	-	-	2	-
Professional sector overall	83	-	14	58	11
2015 total	169	-	31	122	16

New programmes in the Netherlands

In the year under review, the number of initial accreditations processed in the Netherlands rose by some 10 percent (2015: 68; 2014: 60) (see Table 5). The number of decisions withdrawn (17) demonstrates that approx. a quarter of the new programmes have not managed to bring their quality up to standard; in another approx. 20 percent of the cases, conditions were imposed. This means that still a relatively large number of programmes are insufficiently prepared when submitting assessment applications to NVAO.

Table 5: Total number of applications for initial accreditation processed in the Netherlands as of 31 December 2015

	Final total	Positive	Condit. positive	Cond. met	Cond. not met	Application withdrawn
2015						
Academic higher education						
Publicly funded	18	14	3	1	-	-
Privately funded	5	3	-	1	-	1
Academic higher education overall	23	17	3	2		1
Professional higher education						
Publicly funded	11	6	1	1	-	3
Privately funded	34	9	9	3	1	13
Professional higher education overall	45	15	10	4		16
2015 total	68	32	13	6	-	17

New programmes in Flanders

The number of new programmes provided in Flanders did not change much last year (2015: 14; 2014: 12) (see Table 6). Few new programmes are provided in Flanders. The broad basis of the programmes allows the institutions to profile their distinctive features. In addition, a legislative amendment prohibits the introduction of new specialisations within existing programmes. Finally, the university colleges and universities have agreed on a moratorium on new bachelor's and master's programmes for the academic years of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

Table 6: Total number of applications for initial accreditation processed in Flanders as of 31 December 2015

	Final total	Positive	Application withdrawn
2015			
Academic sector			
Statutory registered institutions	5	5	-
Registered institutions	-	-	-
Academic sector overall	5	5	-
Professional sector			
Statutory registered institutions	9	7	2
Registered institutions	-	-	-
Professional sector overall	9	7	2
2015 total	14	12	2

Institutional audits in the Netherlands

In the past three years, applications for institutional audits from a total of 34 institutions were processed in the Netherlands (see Table 7). Conditions were set down for ten institutions. Eight institutions have demonstrated that they have satisfied the conditions; two universities will be reassessed in 2016. A total of five institutions withdrew their applications.

Table 7: Total number of applications for institutional audits processed in the Netherlands as of 31 December 2015

	Total	Positive	Conditionally positive	Positive after cond.
Academic higher education				
Publicly funded	14	10	2	2
Privately funded	1	-	-	1
Academic higher education overall	15	10	2	3
Professional higher education				
Publicly funded	18	13	-	5
Privately funded	1	1	-	-
Professional higher education overall	19	14	-	5
Total	34	24	2	8

**Interview with
Ton van Haaften**



Prof. Dr Ton van Haaften (Leiden University): *'Institutional audits force institutions to systematically examine the internal quality assurance in place for their programmes, and to review and adjust the system wherever necessary. A quality assurance system is of secondary rather than primary importance in a quality-oriented culture: it must enable staff and students to do what they may be asked to.'*

What was the main result of the institutional audit conducted at Leiden University?

'The main result of the institutional audit conducted at Leiden University is – as is the case for most higher education institutions – that it forces the university to examine systematically the internal quality assurance in place for its programmes, and to review and adjust the system wherever necessary. It has induced Leiden University to define several aspects of its view of education and quality assurance in more specific terms, to harmonise the interconnectivity between bottom-up and top-down processes in the quality assurance system, and to implement concrete measures to minimise the internal administrative burden. It has also prompted Leiden University to initiate a study into the accreditation system as such, its impact on the workload of the teaching staff in relation to its results, and the changes that would be required to optimise the system. Based on the outcomes of this study, Leiden University has made a case for replacing the current accreditation system by institutional accreditation.'

Which aspects of quality assurance are considered within your department?

'The diversity of disciplines and programmes within Leiden University requires that all the aspects of the university quality assurance system (view of education and quality assurance, policy, gauging of results, improvement policy, and administrative structure) are substantiated at the departmental level. For example, the intertwining of research and education, one of the pillars of our view of academic education, is manifested differently within the Mathematics and Natural Sciences department than it is within the Humanities department.'

How can teaching staff and students contribute to the quality-oriented culture within the university?

'Educational quality is first and foremost established on the teaching floor, in collaboration between staff and students. Only the interaction between committed, passionate and excellently prepared staff and committed, passionate, and well-prepared students can generate very good education. If one of these links is missing, the educational quality will fall. In addition, it is important for staff and students to discuss whether, and if so, how education may be improved. Thus considered, a quality assurance system is of secondary rather than primary importance in a quality-oriented culture: it must enable staff and students to do what they may be asked to.'

Institutional reviews in Flanders

In 2015, Flanders launched an experiment involving an integrated external quality assurance system. It distinguishes between:

1. the initial accreditation of new programmes;
2. the programme assessment (leading to accreditation) of a well-defined cluster of programmes provided by universities and university colleges, and of all the programmes provided by other higher education institutions; and
3. the institutional review assessing the quality of the educational policy pursued by a university or university college;
4. the assessment of the manner in which universities and university colleges guarantee the quality of their programmes (i.e., control the quality assurance of their programmes) through a third strand.

All the university colleges and universities in Flanders are participating in the experiment. They have opted for both the institutional review and the assessment of the control they exert over the quality of their programmes.

The institutional reviews serve as a benchmark with a view to the introduction of an adapted structural scheme and do not have any consequences. The accreditation of university college and university programmes will be extended for the duration of the experiment.

At the end of 2014, the NVAO project team embarked on the concrete elaboration of the experiment, consulting with all the stakeholders in a feedback group. In 2015 the team worked on the preparation of the first institutional reviews. A scenario and a handbook were developed, and the panel members prepared themselves in interactive sessions. The first site visits to the institutions will commence in March 2016. NVAO keeps all the interested parties abreast of the latest developments through a monthly newsletter.

In the period 2016 to 2017, NVAO will conduct institutional reviews of 18 Flemish universities and university colleges. The assessments will be conducted by review panels that will take an evaluating approach, geared to the context of the institution and the model it has chosen for its educational policy. The panel will enter into dialogue with the institution during a first exploratory and a second in-depth site visit. The second site visit will involve a specific assessment of the manner in which the institutions exert control over the quality of their programmes. The dialogue between the panel and the institution will generate joint views on the operation of the chosen model, which will constitute the basis for the formation of a judgement. NVAO thus evaluates the quality assurance efforts expended by the universities and university colleges over the past decades, offering them the possibility of assuming full responsibility for their own internal quality policy.

For each institution, the panels will draw up an assessment report concerning the institutional review and an advisory report regarding the third strand.

NVAO monitors the consistency of the assessments. All the institutional reviews will have been completed by the summer of 2017, whereupon NVAO will forward the decisions and

underlying reports to the institutions. The decisions and reports will also be published, together with a general overall report. Subsequently, the Flemish Education Minister will have the statutorily stipulated evaluation conducted in the second half of 2017. On the basis of the conclusions, the Flemish government will submit the statutory stipulations to the Flemish Parliament for approval, in order to introduce a new higher education quality assurance system in Flanders to come into force in 2020.

Distinctive (quality) features (the Netherlands and Flanders)

In 2015, NVAO awarded distinctive features to 16 Dutch programmes. Two Flemish programmes were also awarded a distinctive quality feature in the year under review. The following statutory distinctive features were awarded in 2015:

- "sustainability / sustainable higher education" to three programmes;
- "internationalisation" to five programmes, three of which with a score of "good";
- "entrepreneurship" to one Dutch and one Flemish programme.

With respect to two applications for "small-scale and intensive education", NVAO submitted a positive recommendation to the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science in the year under review.

With effect from 1 January 2016, NVAO will adopt the ECA Framework for the Assessment of Quality in Internationalisation, dated February 2015, with respect to the distinctive (quality) feature of internationalisation.

HBO5 (Flanders)

HBO5, professional higher education at level 5 of the Flemish qualification structure, comprises programmes with a professional orientation, such as stage four nursing, that do not directly lead to a bachelor's or master's degree. HBO5 programmes carry 90 to 120 credits and lead to a "*graduaat*" certificate.

In the spring of 2015, NVAO organised 12 site visits in the framework of the cluster assessment of the new HBO5 Shop management programme, to be provided by ten different consortiums. All the programmes meet the generic quality standards, and guarantee that the students are able to attain the intended learning outcomes. The Flemish government eventually gave seven institutions permission to launch these programmes.

Modification of study load (Flanders)

University colleges and universities may apply to the Flemish government to modify the study load of existing (master's) programmes. This arrangement applies to a limited number of programmes. NVAO advises the Flemish government whether the applications received meet the criteria set down in law.

In 2015, NVAO processed two applications for modification of a study load; in both cases, a positive advice was issued (2014: 8).

**Interview with
Roxanne Figueroa
Arriagada and
Lennert Noppe**



Roxanne Figueroa Arriagada (Ghent University, National Union of Students in Flanders, VVS): *'As representatives of the students, the quality of the programmes obviously concerns us. There is no such thing as perfection, and it is therefore essential to supplement a programme's positive points with a number of points to work on.'*



Lennert Noppe (Ghent University, National Union of Students in Flanders, VVS): *'Once the new system has been rolled out, the students will continue to speak out with enthusiasm, at both the national and the institutional levels. That is why we continue to invite active contributions from the students.'*

What do you, as students, think of the requirement to publicise information regarding the quality of programmes?

'As representatives of the students, the quality of the programmes obviously concerns us. Every day we help think about ways to improve programmes and how students can be involved in that improvement. It is important for prospective students to have a proper view of the quality of the programmes they are considering. It is not a competitive system – which programme scores best? – but rather the subtle distinctions that make the difference: what does a particular programme at institution X focus on, what does institution Y focus on? Does the programme excel in academic research, or is it an aspect it needs to work on? Making such matters public enables prospective students to make a more well-founded choice regarding their education.'

What information do students need regarding the programmes?

'Of course it matters what type of information a university or university college makes public. If each institution were to trumpet forth its own programmes' praises, that would not be helpful to the students. The information presented needs to be a correct reflection of the programme. That is why we consider it important to include both positive and negative aspects, as every programme will have. There is no such thing as perfection, and it is therefore essential to supplement a programme's positive points with a number of points to work on. In addition, the improvement measures implemented by the institution should also be made public.'

How should this information be structured?

'The public nature of this information on quality is one thing; on the other hand we also consider it important that this public information is presented to prospective students in an easily accessible manner. Few people will take the trouble of sifting through several

hundreds of pages of reports; that is why it is important for the students to be able to obtain an overview: once more, not to promote competition among institutions, but rather to display each programme's emphases and distinct subtleties. Only then will a prospective student be able to make a balanced decision regarding which programme at which institution would best suit him or her.'

What do you expect from the institutional review?

'Quite a lot has changed with respect to quality assurance, and we expect the months ahead to be especially busy. It will mean a great change for the institutions, that from now on will be required to conduct a self-reflection, but also for NVAO, that will need to steer everything in the right direction. However, the student representatives are confident that the quality of the programmes in Flanders will be monitored in a consistent and transparent manner, following this period of change. As student representatives, we would therefore like to reiterate that we take a positive view of the commitment we have experienced, not just at the SAMENarief seminar (held on 3 February 2016), but also during other NVAO consultations to which we are invariably invited. Once the new system has been rolled out, the students will continue to speak out with enthusiasm, at both the national and the institutional levels. That is why we continue to invite active contributions from the students.'

Interview with Kristiaan Versluys



Prof. Dr. Kristiaan Versluys (Ghent University): *'Generally speaking, the institutional review+ has greatly energised both educational policy and educational quality assurance. Within a very short time, the intensive collaboration of all those involved, at all levels, has resulted in the introduction of new methods, policy documents and bodies to complement the already existing instruments.'*

How have the institutional review and the evaluating approach been introduced within Ghent University?

'A representative working group, chaired by the deputy vice-chancellor, has prepared the critical self-reflection. Six strategic objectives have been set down in a number of in-depth policy documents. On the one hand, these six objectives tie in with current practice and already existing policy options of the university. On the other hand, they look ahead to the future and provide guidelines for adjustment and change.'

What impact did they have? Has it changed matters?

'The institutional review has prompted an intensified self-reflection process, at both the institutional level and the level of faculties and programmes. In particular, faculties and all the programmes have been requested to set down their policy in explicit terms, with a view to the six strategic objectives. Dynamic portfolios have been developed to this end, outlining not just the current status questionis, but also reflecting plans for the future. They are based on the PDCA cycle and enable the programmes to document the initiatives they are taking to attain the strategic objectives. The balance between

centralised direction and the responsibility of faculties and programmes is monitored. On the one hand, the faculties still have room for a differentiated substantiation of central initiatives. On the other hand, the policy pursued by the faculties is based on central choices, while the central initiatives are fed by best practices in the field.'

How do the teaching staff and the students react?

'The policy documents and the critical self-reflection have been established following a broad-based consultation of all echelons, in particular the teaching staff and the students. In addition to their consideration in the appropriate official channels (Education Council, Governing Board), all the policy options and all the preparatory documents were assessed in unofficial meetings, in particular two series of breakfast sessions with students and programme committee chairs. The new policy and monitoring instruments (portfolios) have also been extensively explained in info sessions and workshops within the faculties and programmes. In addition, an intensive information campaign is currently underway, comprising for example widely distributed posters presenting the six objectives, and a well-attended and highly successful education day on 17 March last.'

Responsibility for quality assurance now lies with the programmes. Has this led to changes?

'The external assessments have been replaced by an internal quality assurance system that monitors each programme separately. To this end, new methods, bodies and monitoring methods have been developed. The programmes have been incorporated into a system of internal assessments which we call peer learning visits. These visits are conducted once every six years, on average. Each programme is visited by three programme committee chairs, an external expert in the field, and a student. The intentions are formative rather than summative. The visits are aimed at mutual learning, exchanging good practices, and collectively improving programmes. Nonetheless, a formal report is submitted to the Education Quality Agency, a new and authoritative body that may intervene in the event of deficiencies or sub-standard performance. The first peer learning visits demonstrate that the visits (rather than assessments) are characterised by a constructive atmosphere, in which the programme's strengths as well as its points for improvement are discussed freely. In addition, quality consultations are held every other year, during which the responsible faculty staff (dean, director of education) discuss the educational policy pursued with the Educational Affairs Directorate (Director of Educational Affairs, department head of quality assurance).'

Promoting a quality-oriented culture

In the review of the Flemish accreditation system, the concept of "quality-oriented culture" constituted one of the key design principles for the reform of the accreditation system. The new system enables the institutions once more to optimise their own internal quality policies. In the Netherlands, quality-oriented culture also plays an important part in the plans for the new accreditation system.

Last year, NVAO organised a reflective meeting in The Hague for its staff on internal quality assurance and quality-oriented culture.

International perspective

NVAO fulfils its tasks from an international perspective and within the context of the European Bologna process. NVAO is a member of three international networks of quality assurance organisations in higher education: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

NVAO provides the secretariat and sits on the board of ECA. In October 2015, NVAO Chair Anne Flierman was elected to the ENQA Board during the ENQA General Assembly. NVAO administrators and staff sit on ENQA and ECA working groups. Active membership of these networks fosters the exchange of topical expertise regarding quality assurance, participation in international projects, and building relationships with international experts who can participate in assessments. NVAO is also registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and in 2015 supplied the Vice Chair of the EQAR Register Committee.

In addition to collaboration between the Netherlands and Flanders, and within the international networks of quality assurance agencies, international cooperation with similar organisations provides insight into best practices of external quality assessment, and enables mutual learning from and capitalising on one another's experiences. For that reason, NVAO delegations have visited sister organisations in Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom. NVAO has participated in a Norwegian-British-Swedish initiative aimed at benchmarking master's programmes.

In 2015, the Education Ministers of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg took the decision to automatically recognise one another's higher education diplomas. This decision is vital to the further expansion of mutual recognition of accreditation decisions and diplomas in the European higher education area.

The first European *Certificates for Quality in Internationalisation* were presented in February 2015 during an ECA conference in Paris, six years after NVAO took the first initiative to make the quality of internationalisation transparent and measurable. The framework and the methodology were tested during twelve preceding pilots in just as many countries (Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation – CeQulnt project). In addition to universities from Finland and France, a faculty from Spain and programmes from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia and France participated in the pilots. A European online platform was set up to exchange experiences in the field of internationalisation. The NVAO Good Practices in Internationalisation Platform (GPIP) was incorporated into this new platform.

During the Bologna meeting in Yerevan, in May 2015, the European Education Ministers adopted the proposal regarding a European approach to the accreditation of joint programmes. The proposal has been developed by a European group of experts and is based on the experiences with the accreditation of joint programmes and the outcomes of the NVAO coordinated JOQAR project. NVAO sat on the group of experts.

In 2015, NVAO adopted the accreditation of a number of programmes under the ECA Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint

Programmes (MULTRA). This agreement spares international joint programmes from having to undergo multiple accreditation procedures. In order to simplify the assessment and accreditation procedures of joint degree programmes in the Netherlands, Flanders and Germany, NVAO signed a collaboration agreement with the German Akkreditierungsrat in July 2015.

In May and October 2015, NVAO also signed collaboration agreements with the American sector association and accreditation organisation for business schools, AACSB International, and the European management development network EFMD to streamline the various assessment procedures, reduce the administrative burden, and make double accreditations possible. In these sectors, the specific requirements of the discipline, profession or sector can now be taken into consideration during the general accreditation by NVAO, while the responsibilities of all the parties involved remain unchanged. In the years ahead, NVAO intends to conclude more such international collaboration agreements. The leading factor in this will be the need for such forms of collaboration among the higher education institutions.

In the year under review, the meetings of the above international organisations attended, and the presentations before an international audience by NVAO Executive Board members, the policy advisors of the Internationalisation department, and other policy advisors totalled 60. In 2015, the following articles were published and the following contributions were made to (international) meetings:

- “Verantwoorden, verbeteren, verbinden” [Giving account, improving, connecting], keynote address by Paul Zevenbergen, Toetsen en Examineren in het hoger onderwijs [Tests and Exams in higher education] conference, March 2015;
- “Internationale ontwikkelingen in kwaliteitszorg (2005-2015)” [International developments in quality assurance], article by Lucien Bollaert, Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid (TORB 04, March-April, 2014-2015);
- “Lowering the burden, not the bar” speech by Paul Zevenbergen, AACSB Annual Accreditation Conference: Europe, Middle East and Africa, May 2015;
- Interview with Dr Anne Flierman, special issue 'Grip op Kwaliteit' [Grip on Quality], De Link Magazine voor Onderwijslogistiek, June 2015;
- “Kwaliteitsadviseurs en kwaliteitscultuur” [Quality advisors and quality-oriented culture], presentation by Lucien Bollaert, Nederlands Netwerk voor Kwaliteitsmanagement (NNK) workshop, June 2015;
- Article “Samen zoeken naar het juiste evenwicht” [Joining forces to seek the proper balance], about new developments in the accreditation system, by Dr Anne Flierman, TH&MA 2015, no. 3, July 2015;
- Article “Kijken naar het geheel, niet naar de delen” [Considering the whole, not the parts], about simplification and mutual recognition of joint programmes, by Dr Mark Frederiks, TH&MA 2015, no. 3, July 2015;
- Seminar “The Development of Higher Education as a Factor of Overcoming the Economic Crisis”, speech by Lucien Bollaert, Moscow, 25 September 2015;
- ECA webinar “Quality, Quality Assurance and Quality Culture in Higher Education”, Lucien Bollaert, 20 October 2015.

In 2015, NVAO received various foreign delegations: from Benin; from the Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE); from the Japanese Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE); from the Commission of University Education, Kenya; academics and quality assurance staff from Algerian universities; representatives from the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia; and from the National Accreditation Council for Technical Education (NACTE) in Tanzania.

In October 2015, NVAO organised, together with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, a *Peer Learning Event on the Assessment and Demonstration of Achieved Learning Outcomes*, attended by nearly 100 delegates from universities in a dozen European countries. The conference took place under the EU-funded Facilitating Bologna Tools (FaBoTo) project.

In December 2015, NVAO organised the annual Winter Seminar in The Hague, together with ECA. This year's theme was "National Implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes". The seminar was attended by more than 100 national and international participants.

Other activities

Other accomplishments of NVAO in 2015:

- The validation of 56 discipline-specific learning outcomes in Flanders (7 academically oriented bachelor's programmes; 12 professionally oriented bachelor's programmes; 23 master's programmes; 2 advanced bachelor's programmes, and 12 advanced master's programmes);
- Positive decisions regarding four applications from Dutch institutions for the combination of programmes (planning-neutral conversion). Two applications have been held over for decision-making in 2016;
- Two applications processed within the framework of the procedure to be registered as a Dutch recognised private institution (aggravated extensive initial accreditation). Both applications were withdrawn without a decision being reached;
- Two requests processed under the Dutch Open Government Act (WOB). No appeals were lodged against the NVAO decisions, which means these cases have been settled;
- Receipt of a verdict from the Limburg court in one WOB case; this appeal was dismissed. In another case, the appellant withdrew his appeal to the Limburg court. Both cases have thus been settled;
- With respect to one dossier, an internal appeal was processed, which resulted in a dismissal;
- One appeal was lodged with the Dutch Administrative Justice Division of the Council of State; this appeal is still under consideration. No verdicts were issued by other judicial agencies in the Netherlands;
- In Flanders, no appeals were lodged against NVAO decisions in 2015.

Collaboration with principals and stakeholders

NVAO holds regular consultations with the Vice Prime Minister of the Flemish Government, the Flemish Education Minister and the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Once or twice a year, the NVAO Executive Board participates in consultations between the two Ministers (Committee of Ministers).

NVAO regularly consults at the content and/or process level with the Dutch and Flemish Ministries of Education about various projects.

In the Flemish feedback group, NVAO organises the consultations with the Ministry of Education and Training, the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR) and the student organisation VVS regarding the development of the Flemish accreditation system and any other topics that call for consultation. NVAO is an observer on the Steering Committee for learning outcomes of the VLUHR. With the Dutch quality assessment agencies and the Flemish quality assessment agency VLUHR-KZ, NVAO periodically discusses the performance of the assessment procedures.

At different levels, NVAO maintains contact with various Dutch and Flemish umbrella organisations: the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), the Council of Flemish University Colleges (VLHORA), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH), the Dutch Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions (NRTO), the Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education (Nuffic), the National Academic Recognition Information Centre in Flanders (NARIC Vlaanderen); and with the student organisations – the Dutch National Students Association (ISO), the Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb) and the National Union of Students in Flanders (VVS). For student panel members, NVAO organises annual training and “reunion days”.

Furthermore, NVAO collaborates with the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV); the Dutch Inspectorate of Education; the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Dutch Education Council.

Interview with Tycho Wassenaar and Stefan Wirken



Tycho Wassenaar (ISO): *'The formation of a student panel is a milestone. Students have a major responsibility to make an active contribution to the improvement of their education. The ISO is pleased with the recognition that combining an accountability function and a quality improvement function does not work well. In addition, room must be created for experiments with other forms of accreditation.'*



Stefan Wirken (LSVb): *'The debate on quality assurance has degenerated into a discussion in which the burden occasionally appears to be more important than quality. In view of the broadly shared aim to reduce the burden, quality should undisputedly be the spearhead. Differentiation should be abolished.'*

What were the main results of the accreditation system in the Netherlands?

Wassenaar: *'For us as student representatives, the formation of a student panel is a milestone. Politicians and the Minister all applauded this initiative, and have pledged their word that the student panel will come into being. A separate panel that actively collects the experiences of students to be used in the accreditation of a programme ensures that we will have a more comprehensive view of the quality of a programme, as seen through the eyes of students, and that the voice of students will play a more important part.'*

Wirken: *'Our accreditation system has turned out to be quite useful and is appreciated at the international level. Its clear focus on quality has provided programmes with improvement periods, thus enabling them to deliver the quality desired. Since the foundation of NVAO in 2005, we as students have perceived an increased attention to the quality of education among institutions. In addition, the judgements enable a national picture to be drawn, showing which sectors perform well and which are lagging behind. For example, they have revealed that the teacher training programmes and the humanities require additional attention. These are clear signals that have put quality at the top of the agenda as a spearhead within these sectors.'*

How can students successfully contribute to the quality-oriented culture within universities?

Wassenaar: *'Students have a major responsibility to make an active contribution to the improvement of their education. By participating in the decision-making, but also by simply voicing their opinion, students may compel changes and improve education. Students are designers rather than consumers of education.'*

Wirken: *'In the participation councils, students may provide input regarding the ins and outs of their programmes and institutions. In the near future, programme committees will also have the right of assent to matters involving educational content, which means that the students, as the main stakeholders, will have a direct influence on the education provided, together with the teaching staff. Furthermore, the Minister has embraced the plan to involve "student panels" in accreditations. This is a panel of students that will have a direct influence in the assessment of a programme. We are currently discussing the substantiation of such panels, together with ISO and NVAO. Thus, the student perspective will be factored in to an even greater extent in programme assessments. In addition, it is obviously always important for each student enrolled in higher education to take a critical stance and make a pro-active contribution to the quality-oriented culture. Education is something that ultimately requires efforts on the part of all the actors.'*

Generally speaking, in what direction can external quality assurance best develop?

Wassenaar: *'In an ideal situation, external quality assurance is actually redundant. Students, staff and administrators provide quality assurance, by together evaluating and improving education. Unfortunately, we have not reached that stage yet. The ISO is quite pleased with the recognition that combining an accountability function and a quality improvement function does not work well. They really need to be kept separate.'*

'In addition, the ISO is convinced that room must be created for experiments with other forms of accreditation, in which internal quality assurance is actually incorporated into external quality assurance. These domains are still too separate and not mutually transparent.'

Wirken: 'Independent external inspection of the quality of programmes is important. Optimum quality and optimum inspection must be leading factors in this respect. It is evident that this requires maximum efficiency, and that it would be advisable to consider how the burden could be minimised. However, the debate on quality assurance has degenerated in a discussion in which the burden occasionally appears to be more important than the quality. Yet in view of the broadly shared aim to reduce the burden, quality should undisputedly be the spearhead. The new plans for a student panel means that students, as stakeholders, will be increasingly involved in future accreditations. In addition, in our opinion it would be interesting to see what could happen with accreditation at the faculty level. The discussion about changes in the system appeared to focus on institutional accreditation. However, lessons can also be learned from the joint accreditation of law programmes. We think that this best practice could also be applied to other programmes, considering for example the similarities between biomedical sciences and medicine, or the overlap within the humanities. Differentiation, finally, should be abolished. NVAO is responsible for safeguarding generic quality. Once this has been achieved, its role as "quality assessor" will have been completed. In many cases, the intercomparability of programmes is limited and apart from that, educational quality cannot be gauged unequivocally. Consequently, such assessments are subject to a large measure of subjectivity. We are actively engaged in the debate on the optimisation of the current system and are keeping a keen eye on developments.'

Organisation **NVAO Board and Advisory Council**

The Board met twelve times in 2015. The Executive Board of NVAO assembled weekly. In the year under review, the Executive Board organised additional separate meetings on strategic policy. These were also attended by members of the Board and/or the Management Team.

Two changes were effected at the administrative level in 2015. Mr L. Bollaert resigned from the NVAO Board with effect from 1 December 2015 on account of his retirement. Vice Chair Ms A.M.J. Demeulemeester was appointed General Director of Familiehulp, the largest home help agency in Flanders, with effect from 1 January 2016.

In December 2015, NVAO organised a farewell reception for Mr Bollaert at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp. Words of gratitude were extended by Willy Claes (Chair, Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges VLUHR); Karl Dittrich (Chair, Association of Universities in the Netherlands VSNU); Paul Garré (Director of Education and Quality, Odisee) and Colin Tuck (Director, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education).

The farewell celebration for Ms Demeulemeester took place in January 2016 at the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels. Day Chair Guy Tegenbos discussed good education and good care, trust, external quality assurance and internal quality culture with Pascale De Groote (General Director, Artesis Plantijn University College); Inge Vervotte (Board Member, Emmaüs healthcare and welfare organisation); Rik Torfs (Vice Chancellor, University of Leuven) and Leendert Klaassen (Chair, Executive Board of Stenden UAS).

Minister Hilde Crevits, Vice Prime Minister of the Flemish government and Education Minister of Flanders, gave the keynote address at both gatherings.

On the recommendation of Minister Crevits, the Committee of Ministers appointed Ms A. Verreth and Dr M.J.J. Luwel as new Flemish members of the NVAO Board, with effect from 1 January 2016. They both sit on the Executive Board. Ann Verreth is the new Vice Chair.

Composition of the Board of NVAO (in alphabetical order, 31 December 2015)

Anne Flierman (Chair)
Ann Verreth (Vice Chair)
Bruno Bruins
Mia De Schampelaere
Ruddy Doom
Koen Geven
Marc Luwel
Bart Maes
Paul van Roon
Claire Tillekaerts
Jasper Tuytel
Lieteke van Vucht Tijssen
Paul Zevenbergen

Composition of the Executive Board of NVAO (in alphabetical order)

Anne Flierman (Chair)
Ann Demeulemeester (Vice Chair) (up to 31 December 2015)
Ann Verreth (Vice Chair) (with effect from 1 January 2016)
Lucien Bollaert (up to 30 November 2015)
Marc Luwel (with effect from 1 January 2016)
Paul Zevenbergen

Composition of the Advisory Council of NVAO (in alphabetical order, 31 December 2015)

Pim Breebaart (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences - Vereniging Hogescholen)
Luc Van De Velde (Council of Flemish University Colleges - VLHORA)
Tom Demeyer (Flanders Social and Economic Council SERV - on behalf of the employers)
Joris Gevaert (National Union of Students in Flanders - VVS)
Ton van Haften (Association of Universities in the Netherlands - VSNU)
Harry Martens (Flemish Interuniversity Council - VLIR)
Truus Omta (Dutch Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions - NRTO)
Jan Soons (Flanders Social and Economic Council SERV - on behalf of the employees)
Josephine Verstappen (Dutch National Union of Students - LSVb)
vacancy (Dutch National Students Association - ISO)

Deputy members

Ann De Schepper (VLIR)
Hugo Deckers (SERV - on behalf of the employees)
Nele Muys (SERV - on behalf of the employers)
Machteld Verbruggen (VLHORA)
Edith Willekens (VVS)

Organisation

The year 2015 saw various developments at the organisational level as well as with respect to the systems.

The Process Coordination and Training project groups continued their activities in the year under review.

These projects have generated a jointly supported profile for the role of process coordinators and a profile for the chairs of programme assessment panels. In addition, project teams were set up for the implementation of the institutional review, the pilots in Flanders, and the development of the future accreditation system in the Netherlands.

With respect to internal quality assurance, the plan of action 2015-2016 was endorsed. It focuses more attention to the external evaluations of the NVAO procedures. The inquiries have yielded positive results; points for attention are the monitoring of the procedural timeframes, pro-active communication on this, and the reduction of the administrative burden. In addition, in 2015 preparations commenced for the ENQA review scheduled for the spring of 2017.

In the year under review, the HRM department has worked on developing an HRM vision, structuring staff policy, and the elaboration of specific components of staff policy. Various staff reflection days were organised with a view to reinforcing the quality-oriented culture in the organisation. The Staff Representation Body was reformed in the year under review and met several times with the employer for consultations.

In close consultation with the Staff Representation Body, an interim evaluation was conducted in the summer of 2015 regarding the new management structure of the organisation. The results will be incorporated into the strategic points of departure for 2016.

Dr S.E.A. van Galen resigned from his position on the NVAO Management Team with effect from 1 September 2015, on account of his appointment as General Manager of the Office of the University of Groningen. In August 2015, NVAO organised a farewell reception for Dr Van Galen's business contacts. At the end of the year, NVAO recruited a new team leader, who will take up his duties in April 2016.

Composition of Management Team (in alphabetical order, 31 December 2015)

Rudy Derdelinckx (Director)

Nancy Van San (Team Leader Planning)

Manon Wortel (Head of Operational Management)

vacancy (Team Leader Policy)

In the year under review, NVAO employed 43 persons (2014: 48) (see Table 8). In 2015, A Dutch and a Flemish policy adviser were appointed to succeed departing staff. In addition, a permanent receptionist was appointed and a small group of regular temporary and stand-by workers was called in as a back-up for operational management, catering/logistics and IT. At the end of the year, a procedure was launched to recruit four new policy advisers to take up office in early 2016.

The applications were processed with a smaller staff establishment in the year under review, yet the projects determining the future of the Flemish and Dutch systems were also substantiated and various other projects were completed. Consequently, the workload was quite high. It is not expected to decrease, given the future range of duties and the terms of reference.

Table 8: FTEs per position, as of 31 December (excl. Board and temporary staff)

Position	FTEs employed in 2015	FTEs seconded in 2015	2015 total	FTEs employed in 2014	FTEs seconded in 2014	2014 total
Executive Board						
Board	3.0	-	3.0	3.0	1.0	4.0
			3.0			4.0
Management Team						
Management	-	1.0	1.0	-	1.0	1.0
Head of Operational Management	1.0	-	1.0	1.0	-	1.0
Team leaders	1.0	-	1.0	2.0	-	2.0
			3.0			4.0
Staff						
Communication	2.1	-	2.1	2.1	-	2.1
Lawyer	0.8	-	0.8	0.8	-	0.8
			2.9			2.9
Policy advisers						
Policy advisers	13.7	1.0	14.7	16.6	1.0	17.6
International policy advisers	2.2	1.0	3.2	3.2	-	3.2
			17.9			20.8
Operational management and support						
Financial affairs	2.1	-	2.1	1.1	-	1.1
Personnel department	1.0	-	1.0	1.0	-	1.0
Support	9.5	-	9.5	9.5	-	9.5
IT	2.0	-	2.0	2.0	-	2.0
Catering and logistics	1.1	-	1.1	2.2	-	2.2
			15.7			15.8
Total	39.5	3.0	42.5	44.5	3	47.5

CDHO – CMMBO

The NVAO building also accommodates the Committee for Effective Higher Education (CDHO) and the Committee for Macro Efficiency in Vocational Training (CMMBO) (see Table 9). These committees operate independently. NVAO bears responsibility for the logistics, facilities and staffing of the committees.

Table 9: CDHO and CMMBO, FTEs per position, 31 December

Position	FTEs employed in 2015	FTEs seconded in 2015	2015 total	FTEs employed in 2014	FTEs seconded in 2014	2014 total
CDHO	3.75	-	3.75	3.75	-	3.75
CMMBO	-	1.0	1.0	-	-	-
Total	3.75	1.0	4.75	3.75	-	3.75

In 2015, in terms of communication, NVAO focused on reporting on the completed decision-making process, the results of the accreditation rounds involving primary school teacher training programmes and post-graduate teacher training programmes, the international collaboration agreements; the first European internationalisation certificates; the administrative changes, and the developments with respect to the review of the Flemish and Dutch accreditation systems.

January 2015 saw the biennial NVAO conference in the Flemish Parliament building in Brussels. The theme of the conference was the organisation's tenth anniversary in February 2015. Day Chair Annelies Beck hosted a panel discussion with Dirk van Damme (Head of the Innovation and Measuring Progress Division IMEP OECD); Anne De Paepe (Vice Chancellor, Ghent University); Ron Bormans (Chair, Executive Board of Rotterdam UAS); Ann Vancoillie (delegated Board Member of Creaplan, CEO Aluvision, Chair of Unizo Internationaal, Womed Award 2012), and Klaasjan Boon (LSVb/ISO). Ms Beck also conducted interviews with Hilde Crevits, Vice Prime Minister of the Flemish government and Education Minister of Flanders, and Jet Bussemaker, Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Keynote addresses were given by NVAO Chair Anne Flierman and NVAO Vice Chair Ann Demeulemeester.

In addition, the anniversary was commemorated in nine other activities and internal/external gatherings, such as a Summer Get-Together for external business contacts.

In the spring of 2015, NVAO published its report entitled *Vier jaar nieuw Nederlands accreditatiestelsel in cijfers* [The new Dutch accreditation system, four years in figures], which provided input for the further development of the system.

With respect to computerisation, the new NVAO website went online in the summer of 2015, as an external component of the new portal. In addition to its regular systems, workplace and applications management, in the year under review NVAO worked on the optimisation of its databank comprising the accreditation data of Dutch and Flemish institutions and programmes.

Data from the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO) and the Higher Education Register has been enhanced with NVAO data and linked to various internal and external databanks.

Abbreviations

AKOV	Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming (<i>Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training</i>)
CeQuInt	Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation
CDHO	Commissie Doelmatigheid Hoger Onderwijs (<i>Committee for Effective Higher Education</i>)
CMMBO	Commissie Doelmatigheid MBO (<i>Committee for Macro-Efficiency in Vocational Training</i>)
CROHO	Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs (<i>Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes</i>)
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EP-Nuffic	Expertise and service centre for internationalisation in Dutch education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
GPIP	Good Practices in Internationalisation Platform
HOR	Hogeronderwijsregister (<i>Higher Education Register</i>)
Inspectorate	Education Inspectorate
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in HO
ISO	Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (<i>Dutch National Students Association</i>)
KNAW	Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie voor Wetenschappen (<i>Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences</i>)
LSVb	Landelijke Studenten Vakbond (<i>Dutch National Union of Students</i>)
NRTO	Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding (<i>Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions</i>)
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (<i>Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders</i>)
SERV	Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (<i>Flanders Social and Economic Council</i>)
VH	Vereniging Hogescholen (<i>Flanders Association of University Colleges</i>)
VKW	Wet versterking kwaliteitswaarborgen hoger onderwijs (<i>Strengthening Quality Guarantees in Higher Education Act</i>)

VLHORA	Vlaamse Hogescholenraad (<i>Council of Flemish University Colleges</i>)
VLIR	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (<i>Flemish Interuniversity Council</i>)
VLUHR	Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (<i>Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges</i>)
VLUHR-KZ	Flemish quality assessment agency
VSNU	Vereniging van Universiteiten (<i>Association of Universities in the Netherlands</i>)
VVS	Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten (<i>National Union of Students in Flanders</i>)
WHW	Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (<i>Dutch Higher Education and Research Act</i>)

NVAO The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) was established by Treaty by the Dutch and Flemish governments to provide an expert and objective assessment of the quality of higher education in Flanders and in the Netherlands.

The tasks and working methods of NVAO are set down in law. Its main tasks are:

1. assessing and assuring the level and the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders;
2. promoting the quality-oriented culture within the higher education sector.

NVAO carries out these tasks from an international perspective and within the context of the European Bologna process. In the performance of its tasks, NVAO is transparent towards society and all stakeholders in higher education, and respectful of the autonomy of the institutions and their primary responsibility for the quality of the education they provide.

Colophon *Systems in motion*
NVAO Annual Report 2015 Summary

June 2016

Compilation: NVAO

NVAO

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