

# INITIAL ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

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## 1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

The initial accreditation framework for new higher education programmes comprises:

1. An assessment framework consisting of themes, standards and criteria
2. The decision rules and assessment scale
3. A description of the initial accreditation procedure, including the criteria to be used by the NVAO to evaluate the external assessment and the panel report.

1. The standards used in accreditation procedures are organised into six themes. These six themes are:

1. Aims and objectives
2. Curriculum
3. Staff
4. Services
5. Internal quality assurance
6. Conditions for continuity

Each theme has corresponding standards and every standard has a corresponding criterion or corresponding criteria. (See Chapter 2)

2. The initial accreditation procedure is subject to assessment rules. These must be observed when making a judgement. (See chapter 3).

3. An initial accreditation procedure has been established. Although the same criteria apply to all new programmes, initial accreditations may vary in scope. Programmes that are not yet offered in the Netherlands or the contents of which differ substantially from programmes already offered will be subject to a more intensive initial accreditation procedure than programmes that are already offered in the Netherlands.

The NVAO takes an initial accreditation decision based on an external assessment, which is commissioned by the NVAO. This initial accreditation procedure results in a panel report, which is evaluated on the basis of set criteria. (See chapter 4).

## 2. THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

STANDARDS	CRITERIA
<b>SUBJECT-/DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS</b>	The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the requirements set by professional colleagues, both nationally and internationally and the relevant domain concerned (subject/discipline and/or professional practice).
<b>BACHELOR AND MASTER LEVEL</b>	The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the general, internationally accepted descriptions of a Bachelor's qualification or a Master's qualification
<b>PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION / ACADEMIC ORIENTATION</b>	<p>The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the following descriptions of a Bachelor's and a Master's qualification:</p> <p>Professional orientation (HBO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The intended learning outcomes are also based on the professional profiles and/or professional competences drawn up by (or in collaboration with) the relevant professional field</li> <li>A professional bachelor (HBO-bachelor) has the qualifications at the level of a commencing professional in a specific profession or professional field for which professional higher education is required or useful</li> <li>A professional master (HBO-master) has the qualifications at the level of an independent and/or managerial professional in a profession or professional field, or the level required to function adequately in a multidisciplinary environment for which professional higher education is required or useful.</li> </ul> <p>Academic orientation (WO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The intended learning outcomes are derived from requirements set by the scientific discipline, the international scientific practice and, for programmes to which this applies, the practice in the relevant professional field</li> <li>An academic bachelor (WO-bachelor) has the qualifications that allow access to at least one further programme at academic master's level (WO-master) and the option to enter the labour market</li> <li>An academic master (WO-master) has the qualifications to conduct independent research or to solve multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary questions in a professional field for which academic higher education is required or useful.</li> </ul>

### 2.2. CURRICULUM

STANDARDS	CRITERIA
<b>REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL / ACADEMIC ORIENTATION</b>	<p>The proposed curriculum meets the following criteria for a professional or an academic orientation:</p> <p>Professional orientation (HBO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students develop their knowledge through the study of professional literature, by the study of materials derived from the professional practice and by interaction with the professional field and/or (applied) research</li> <li>The curriculum has verifiable links with current developments in the professional field / the discipline</li> </ul>

- The curriculum ensures the development of professional competences and has verifiable links with current professional practice

Academic orientation (WO):

- The students develop their knowledge through the interaction between education and research within the relevant disciplines
- The curriculum corresponds with current developments in the relevant discipline(s) by verifiable links with current scientific theories
- The programme ensures the development of competences in the field of research
- Where appropriate, the curriculum has verifiable links with the current relevant professional practice.

<b>CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES AND THE CURRICULUM</b>	<p>The intended curriculum, the educational concept, the study methods and the learning assessments reflect the intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>The intended learning outcomes have been adequately transferred into the educational goals of (parts of) the intended curriculum.</p>
<b>CONSISTENCY OF THE CURRICULUM</b>	<p>The contents of the curriculum are internally consistent.</p>
<b>WORKLOAD</b>	<p>The intended curriculum can be successfully completed within the set time, as certain programme-related factors that may be an impediment to study progress are eliminated where possible.</p>
<b>ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS</b>	<p>The structure and contents of the intended curriculum are in line with the qualifications of the incoming students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional bachelor's programme (HBO-bachelor): VWO (pre-university education), HAVO (higher general secondary education), middle management training or specialist training (WEB) or similar qualifications, as demonstrated in the admission process</li> <li>• Academic bachelor's programme (WO-bachelor): VWO (pre-university education), propaedeutic certificate from a <i>hogeschool</i> (HBO) or similar qualifications, as demonstrated in the admission process</li> <li>• Master's programme (HBO- or WO-master): a bachelor's degree and possibly a selection (with a view on the contents of the discipline)</li> </ul>
<b>CREDITS</b>	<p>The programme meets the legal requirements regarding the range of credits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional bachelor's programme (HBO-bachelor): 240 credits</li> <li>• Academic bachelor's programme (WO-bachelor): 180 credits</li> <li>• Professional master's programme (HBO-master): a minimum of 60 credits</li> <li>• Academic master's programme (WO-master): a minimum of 60 credits</li> </ul>

### 2.3. STAFF

STANDARDS	CRITERIA
<b>REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL / ACADEMIC ORIENTATION</b>	<p>The programme meets the following criteria for the deployment of staff for a programme with:</p> <p>Professional orientation (HBO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching is principally provided by staff who link the programme to professional practice</li> </ul> <p>Academic orientation (WO):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching is principally provided by researchers who contribute to the development of the subject/discipline</li> </ul>
<b>QUANTITY OF STAFF</b>	<p>Sufficient capacity is made available to be able to start the proposed programme</p> <p>Sufficient capacity is made available to be able to continue the proposed programme</p>
<b>QUALITY OF STAFF</b>	<p>The staff that is to be deployed is sufficiently qualified to ensure that the aims and objectives regarding content, didactics and organisation of the programme are achieved</p>

### 2.4. SERVICES

STANDARDS	CRITERIA
<b>FACILITIES</b>	<p>Intended housing and facilities are adequate to achieve the learning outcomes.</p>
<b>TUTORING</b>	<p>There is adequate staff capacity to provide tutoring as well as information provision for students, and these are adequate in view of study progress</p>

### 2.5. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

STANDARDS	CRITERIA
<b>SYSTEMATIC APPROACH</b>	<p>A system of internal quality assurance is in place, which uses verifiable objectives and periodical evaluations in order to take measures for improvement</p>
<b>INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF, STUDENTS, ALUMNI AND THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD</b>	<p>Staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field will be actively involved in the internal quality assurance system</p>

## 2.6. CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUITY

<b>STANDARDS</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>
<b>GRADUATION GUARANTEE</b>	The higher education institution ensures that its students can complete the programme
<b>INVESTMENTS</b>	The proposed investments are sufficient to realise the programme (including the facilities and tutoring)
<b>FINANCIAL PROVISIONS</b>	The financial provisions to cover the projected deficit are sufficient to cover the initial losses

### 3. ASSESSMENT RULES

A proposed new programme can receive initial accreditation based on the instructions of the NVAO. In the initial accreditation procedure each of the standards should be marked *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*. A positive initial accreditation decision can only be based on positive judgements of the themes in the assessment framework. The assessment of a theme in the assessment framework is done on the basis of the assessments of the separate standards of that theme.

The assessment report has to make clear how the assessment of the different standards led to the conclusion concerning that theme. In other words, the panel has to clarify how the assessment of a theme is based on the assessments of the underlying standards.

In its initial accreditation decision the NVAO will make clear how its decision is based on the findings of the panel, on an analysis of these findings and on the assessment of the programme based on this initial accreditation framework.

In order to arrive at a positive initial accreditation decision concerning a programme, it must be demonstrated in the assessment that quality is ensured for each of the modes of provision (fulltime, part-time and/or dual), based on the criteria laid out in this assessment framework.

If a proposed programme is to be provided at various locations under one nomenclature in the Government's Central Register (CROHO), the initial accreditation can only have a positive result if the assessment shows that each location will meet the criteria for quality listed in this initial accreditation framework for new programmes.

### 4. THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

#### 1

The initial accreditation is based on the law and on the themes, standards, criteria and assessment rules set out in this initial accreditation framework.

#### 2

The higher education institution compiles documents which give a clear outline of the intended programme and which meet the legal requirements. The institution must produce the following information:

- A description of the programme, using the themes and standards of the initial accreditation framework
- A description of the way in which the programme is concurring with the requirements made by the professional field
- A financial statement listing the required expenditure for developing the programme
- A description of the required quantity of staff and their qualifications.

#### 3

The higher education institution submits an application for initial accreditation to the NVAO, accompanied by the information mentioned under 2. The following details are to be included in the application:

- whether the programme (in a similar form) already exists in higher education in the Netherlands, or whether the programme is new to higher education in the Netherlands
- whether the intended programme leads to a bachelor's degree with a professional orientation (HBO), a master's degree with a professional orientation (HBO), a bachelor's degree with an academic orientation (WO) or a master's degree with an academic orientation (WO)
- whether the programme is offered on a fulltime, part-time and/or dual basis
- whether the programme is an undergraduate or postgraduate programme
- whether the programme is to be provided on one or more locations.

#### 4

Based on the information mentioned under 3 the NVAO determines to what extent the programme in question is new to higher education in the Netherlands. Based on this, the NVAO decides on the scope of the assessment, whether external experts are required for the accreditation procedure, and which particular expertise is required from such external experts.

## 5

The initial accreditation procedure is carried out on the instructions of the NVAO. The subject-/discipline-specific criteria applied during the initial accreditation procedure are in line with the criteria listed in this initial accreditation framework.

## 6

During the initial accreditation procedure it is verified that the intentions and documents meet the criteria listed in this initial accreditation framework. The accreditation procedure results in an overall assessment of the proposed programme, which is laid down in an assessment report.

## 7

The NVAO evaluates the assessment report and its overall assessments and evaluates it with this initial accreditation framework, using the following criteria:

- a. The assessment of the programme is, where relevant, partly based on a comparison with similar other programmes and internationally accepted criteria for programmes in the relevant subject/discipline.
- b. The assessment report clearly states whether or not the proposed programme meets the criteria for quality. The report considers at least the six themes listed in this initial accreditation framework, including all the underlying standards of each theme. Each standard is assessed by giving a judgement, either *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*, which in turn forms the basis for the assessment per theme, also by giving a judgement, either *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*. These assessments are substantiated by facts and analyses as precisely as possible. The report concludes with an overall assessment of the proposed programme.
- c. The assessment report outlines the procedure followed during the initial accreditation procedure, explaining:
  - Methods used
  - Sources of information used
  - If applicable: the frame of reference applied during the accreditation

## 8

The NVAO takes a decision based on the result of the assessment procedure. The institution concerned is notified in writing of the intended decision and is given two weeks to respond. If the programme meets the criteria listed in the initial accreditation framework, the NVAO takes a positive accreditation decision. In this case the programme may be offered for a period of six years. In case of publicly funded programmes, an additional requirement is that the Minister's judgement about the (assessment of the) macro-efficiency of the proposed programme is positive. The institution must register the proposed programme in the Government's Central Register (CROHO) within six months after the decision of the Minister, otherwise the right to offer the programme will lapse.

## 9

The institution has the legal right to submit objections or lodge an appeal against a decision.

## 10

The NVAO publishes the result of the initial accreditation.

The initial accreditation procedure, as described in this chapter, will be evaluated within a maximum of two years after taking effect.

## APPENDIX 1: CLARIFICATION (GENERAL AND BY CHAPTER)

### 1. GENERAL

#### 1.1. THE FOCUS OF ACCREDITATION

The NVAO has been given the legal task to accredit new programmes based on their quality. Initial accreditation includes the evaluation whether conditions for commencing provision of a new programme have been met and whether the proposed programme can be permanently provided. An initial accreditation has to lead to a new registration in the CROHO for the relevant institution involved. An assessment of the effects of a new programme on the national higher education provision and the societal suitability of these programmes (macro-efficiency check) is to be made by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, not by the NVAO. This is considered after the NVAO's initial accreditation procedure.

A positive initial accreditation decision by the NVAO gives the institution the right to offer the programme. An additional condition for receiving public funding is that the Minister subsequently takes a positive decision regarding the macro-efficiency of the application. As the same legal consequences apply – the option to provide the programme for a period of six years - the themes, standards and criteria of the initial accreditation procedure must be broadly consistent with those applied to accreditation procedures of programmes already being offered. However, there are differences in the way the standards and criteria are defined.

Initial accreditation is of a different nature than the accreditation of programmes already being offered, as it concerns accreditation of a proposal. The procedure should clarify whether the proposal is based on clear aims and objectives that correspond with the various requirements for higher education with a professional orientation (HBO) and for higher education with an academic orientation (WO), for bachelor and master level, as well as the subject-/discipline-specific requirements. In addition, the proposal must contain a description of the curriculum, the facilities and provisions which justify the prospect that the aims and objectives will be achieved. In order to enable a successful initial accreditation procedure, high demands are made on the quality of the information the institutions provide (the principle of the burden of proof). If necessary, the NVAO calls in external experts for the assessment.

An important principle for initial accreditation is that the depth of the external assessment (by the expert panel) depends on the extent to which the proposed programme differs from programmes that are already being offered. Although the criteria remain the same, the intensity of the assessment varies. Applications for programmes which do not yet exist in higher education in the Netherlands or whose contents differ substantially from existing programmes will be subject to a more in-depth assessment of the contents than applications for programmes that are provided elsewhere in higher education in the Netherlands as well.

Some examples include:

- In case a programme was taken over by an institution from another higher education institution in the Netherlands and has been accredited elsewhere as a programme already being offered, initial accreditation will largely be limited to staff, internal quality assurance and the conditions for continuity. The assessment of the aims and objectives and the curriculum will in that case be straightforward.
- In case an institution develops a programme itself and it is broadly similar to programmes already being offered in higher education in the Netherlands, the assessment will also include whether the aims and objectives and curriculum are in line with these programmes already being offered elsewhere in the Netherlands.
- In case a proposed programme bears the same name as programmes already offered in higher education in the Netherlands, but differs substantially from those programmes in its details, or in case a programme is new to higher education in the Netherlands (i.e. no listing in CROHO yet), a more in-depth assessment of contents will be carried out, which as a rule includes participation of (foreign) experts.

The description above means that every assessment is proportional. This also manifests itself in the initial accreditation procedure, which stipulates that the methodology applied is determined separately for each application (see clarification in chapter 4). The NVAO intends to review the entire procedure together with the institutions at the latest two years after this framework has taken effect.

The initial accreditation concerns the quality of the programme. If a programme is provided on a fulltime, part-time and/or dual basis, the quality of each of these modes of provision must be demonstrated, because the quality of one does not guarantee the quality of the other.

## **1.2. TRANSPARENCY**

The NVAO considers it its task to contribute to the transparency of the programme provision. This means that the NVAO will verify whether each proposed programme is true to its description. If the name of a proposed programme is already listed in the CROHO, it is verified whether the aims and objectives and the curriculum show sufficient conformity to programmes registered in the CROHO under the same name. This is done to ensure that the relevant name for this programme is justified. In case of proposed programmes, which are not yet provided elsewhere in the Netherlands and therefore are to be considered genuinely new in their content, the institution will have to demonstrate that the intended programme cannot be seen as a variant of an existing programme because of its substantial difference in nature. As a rule, this is the case if at least 40% of the curriculum differs from any existing programme.

## **1.3. INITIAL ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK**

The basic principle is that the institution takes the initiative to have the programme accredited as a bachelor's degree with a professional orientation (*HBO-bachelor*), with an academic orientation (*WO-bachelor*), a master's degree with a professional orientation (*HBO-master*) or a master's degree with an academic orientation (*WO-master*). The initial accreditation is based on the assessment of the following themes:

- Aims and objectives
- Curriculum
- Staff
- Services
- Internal quality assurance
- Conditions for continuity

With regard to the orientation of the programmes (professional or academic), practice shows that there is a continuous line stretching from purely research-based to purely professionally focused programmes. Not only do institutions differ, there are also differences within each domain. For this reason the institution's plan to start a new programme must contain a description of both the research-oriented and professionally oriented aspects. The institution decides whether the programme is listed for accreditation as a degree with a professional orientation (HBO) or a degree with an academic orientation (WO). In the accreditation procedure the programme is only assessed for the orientation stated by the institution.

When drawing up the description of the programme, the institution has to take into account the international requirements of the relevant field of study and the relevant professional field.

The NVAO assesses the quality of a programme by asking three questions:

1. Does the programme meet the subject-/discipline-specific quality requirements regarding the themes stated in the initial accreditation framework?
2. Do the subject-/discipline-specific quality requirements correspond with the (internationally) accepted descriptions of bachelor's and master's levels (Dublin descriptors)?
3. Does the programme meet the criteria of the NVAO's initial accreditation framework?

The programme is therefore in the first place assessed for compatibility with the subject-/discipline-specific quality requirements, which have been derived from an, if possible international, frame of reference. The subject-/discipline-specific quality requirements are in turn compared to the general criteria for bachelor and master's degrees. This means that accreditation must cover both the subject-/discipline-specific quality and the general quality of the proposed programme.

To a certain extent, initial accreditation demands different expertise than the accreditation procedure for programmes already being offered. This concerns in particular the ex ante assessment of the quality of the curriculum, the quality of the staff that are to be deployed and the operational aspects. These additional aspects of initial accreditation require specific expertise.

## 2. CLARIFICATION BY CHAPTER

### *Chapter 1: The initial accreditation framework*

The initial accreditation framework consists of criteria regarding the contents, the procedure followed during the accreditation process and the assessment report. This type of assessment differs from the assessment of programmes already being offered in the fact that the additional option to have distinctive quality features assessed is not possible in an initial accreditation procedure. The underlying principle being that these distinctive quality features must have been demonstrated in practice before they can be assessed.

### *Chapter 2: The assessment framework*

The NVAO assesses the accreditation of the proposed programme by means of the criteria set out in the initial accreditation framework.

#### *Ad 2.1: Aims and objectives*

The aims and objectives of the programme are expressed in the learning outcomes of the students. These qualifications may but do not have to be formulated in terms of competences.

The aims and objectives of the programme are verified for their compatibility with the subject-/discipline-specific quality requirements and general criteria for bachelor's degrees and master's degrees and degrees with a professional orientation (HBO) and with an academic orientation (WO).

The learning outcomes depend on the character of the programme (bachelor or master level, professional or academic orientation, subject-/discipline-specific requirements). The learning outcomes must in any case be in line with the internationally applied descriptions of the bachelor's and master's levels in the relevant domain (for this purpose the so-called Dublin descriptors can be used – see appendix 2). In addition, these learning outcomes must reflect recent developments in the field of study as well as demands from the professional field.

#### *Ad 2.2: Curriculum*

The curriculum must cover the intended subject-/discipline-specific learning outcomes clearly and convincingly. Also, the proposed contents and the structure of the curriculum, including the learning objectives within the curriculum, must allow qualified students who start the programme to obtain these learning outcomes within the timeframe set for the programme. In order to assess the way in which the aims and objectives have been implemented in the programme, an assessment of the contents of the curriculum and the didactic organisation of the programme is required, given the specific choice for bachelor or master level, professional or academic orientation and subject-/discipline-specific requirements. A master's degree will distinguish itself from a bachelor's degree by its greater depth and/or scope. A programme with a professional orientation (HBO) will put emphasis on conveying knowledge and experience from the actual professional practice; while the distinguishing feature of a programme with an academic orientation (WO) is the substantive exchange between teaching and (contemporary) research. As programmes with a professional orientation (HBO) have initiated certain types of research (cf. associate professors, centres of expertise), the exchange between teaching and (applied) research has been added to the criteria for these programmes (HBO) as well. On the other hand, for some programmes with an academic orientation (WO) the professional orientation, in addition to the connection with research, is essential. For this reason a separate criterion

has been added for the programmes to which this applies. To be able to assess programmes in this context, members of the assessment panel that carry out the assessment must usually have subject-/discipline-specific expertise.

The proposal for the new programme will have to provide a clear outline of the structure of the proposed curriculum, including the correspondence between the aims and objectives and the contents of the programme, the consistency of the curriculum, the workload and the admission requirements. This outline must give a realistic description of the intended programme as it will be in operation. The criteria in the initial accreditation framework that are used to assess the proposed programme leave sufficient room for recent developments concerning the standards mentioned above.

The quality of the programme will also have to become clear by its customisation to the qualifications of the admitted students. In this respect the legal requirements for the higher education institutions, as outlined in the initial accreditation framework, apply.

*Ad 2.3: Staff*

The staff of the programme forms an important precondition for quality and a defining factor for the difference between a programme with an academic orientation (WO) and a programme with a professional orientation (HBO). Characteristic of programmes with a professional orientation (HBO) is the knowledge and experience of teaching staff with regard to the exchange with the professional practice, whereas the central feature of programmes with an academic orientation (WO) is active engagement in research. For those programmes with an academic orientation (WO) concerned, staff must also have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the relevant professional field.

The institution must state how many staff members will be deployed in the proposed programme and the quality of these staff members. The assessment of the institution's intentions with regard to this theme is important because the quality of the proposed programme depends heavily on the available staff. Separate assessments will have to be made whether the proposed staff is considered sufficient to start the programme – which will require extra efforts – and to continue the programme on a long-term basis. It will also have to be verified whether the proposed staff will really be available for the proposed programme.

*Ad 2.4: Services*

In principle, the criteria concerning facilities and tutoring apply in the same way to new programmes as to programmes already being provided. The facilities and the tutoring services must be sufficient to realise the programme. The institution must contend convincingly that the relevant services are likely to be available (in time).

The facilities and tutoring concerned will typically include resource centres, laboratories, workshop rooms or subject-specific databases. The nature and level of these facilities differ depending on the character of the programme. During the accreditation procedure the assessment panel will check whether the facilities provided by the proposed programme correspond to the current quality levels generally expected of such facilities.

*Ad 2.5: Internal quality assurance*

In view of the increasing importance of internal quality assurance, this theme is included in the accreditation of new programmes. The institution must demonstrate that it intends to start the proposed programme at a satisfactory quality level and subsequently strive for continuous quality assurance and improvement. The plausibility of these intentions is increased if the institution as a whole operates an effective system of internal quality assurance that applies to all its programmes. The NVAO attaches a lot of importance to quality assurance. The very fact that the NVAO has formulated broad criteria means that quality assurance must be taken into account as a separate issue in the assessment procedure.

#### *Ad 2.6: Conditions for continuity*

Initial accreditation concerns programmes that have yet to commence. This situation brings about particular uncertainties, which are also the subject of the initial accreditation. This concerns in particular the question whether the conditions regarding financial affairs and staff have been met in order to achieve the intended quality of the programme on a long-term basis. These conditions refer both to the programme and to the institution that provides these conditions. It must be argued convincingly that the required initial investments can be made and that it will be possible to continue providing the programme in the long term as well, in any case for the number of years required to develop the full curriculum and the corresponding group of enrolled students. In principle, this period is as long as the expected period required to cover the curriculum, depending on the nature of the programme (bachelor's degree with a professional orientation (HBO), a master's degree with a professional orientation (HBO), a bachelor's degree with an academic orientation (WO) or a master's degree with an academic orientation (WO)). Any start-up losses are acceptable and even providing the programme on a permanent loss-making basis may be acceptable if it supports the institution's strategic policy, but it must be argued convincingly that the institution is able to bear the losses. This will generally appear from a financial plan drawn up for the proposed programme. The financial capacity of the institution as a whole will become apparent in the annual accounts.

The institution is advised to supplement the application for a new programme with a plan that gives an outline of the programmes that the institution intends to provide in the medium term. This plan, which will typically be part of a long-range plan or a strategy document of the institution, may serve to argue that:

- The proposed programme to which the application applies reflects the strategic policy of the institution and its consequent priorities as to programme provision
- The institution will, from the point of view of a sound financial operation, be able to continue providing the entire range of existing and planned programmes.

Such a plan may also serve as source of information for assessing whether the planned investments and the envisaged provision of the proposed programme are realistic in the context of the plans and costs of the institution as a whole. The institution is not obliged to submit such a plan, but it may support the initial accreditation process.

To the NVAO the relevant data are of long-term interest as well. When the next application for accreditation is submitted, the NVAO will check, or have checked, whether the institution has consistently acted upon the conditions mentioned in the first application.

#### *Chapter 3: Assessment rules for initial accreditation*

The initial accreditation results in an overall assessment of the quality of the proposed programme with either a positive or a negative overall conclusion regarding the quality of the proposed programme. In order to be given a positive final assessment, the programme must score satisfactorily on all the six themes listed in the accreditation framework. The assessment per theme is based on the assessments of the underlying standards. The assessment report provides insight into the panel's considerations on all levels (standards, themes and final assessment), so that the grounds on which the overall conclusion is taken, are transparent, including how the various standards have been weighed against each other.

Many programmes are provided on a fulltime, part-time and/or dual basis. As the different modes of provision make equally different demands on a number of requirements for quality, such as consistency of the curriculum, tutoring, staff and admission requirements, the assessment must demonstrate that quality is ensured for each mode of provision. However, the accreditation refers to the new programme as a whole. A similar rule applies to new programmes provided on various locations.

#### Chapter 4: *Initial accreditation procedure*

The initial accreditation procedure adopted by the NVAO is in line with the requirements and time limits stipulated by law. An essential part of this procedure is that the initiative is taken by the institution. The institution decides on the character of the programme (bachelor or master level and professional or academic orientation). By submitting their application, the institution starts the accreditation process.

On the basis of the application the NVAO decides which form of initial accreditation is appropriate. The general part of this clarification illustrates several possible situations. In view of the great variety of categories of new programmes, it is not possible to list the corresponding procedures in detail in advance. These are determined on the basis of the concrete proposals.

Subsequently, the NVAO organises the assessment of the proposed programme. The NVAO assesses the initial accreditation procedure on the basis of the assessment report, taking the criteria mentioned in this chapter as a guideline. The conclusions stated in the assessment report are substantiated by the findings, an analysis of these findings and a check for compatibility with a frame of reference that is in line with the initial accreditation framework. This structure enables the NVAO to understand how the conclusions in the assessment report were reached. The NVAO accounts for the procedure in its initial accreditation decision.

The general principles concerning initial accreditation are transparency of the way in which the conclusions stated in the assessment report were arrived at and the principle of hearing both sides of the argument, which includes an opportunity for the institution to react to the assessment report. Prior to taking the final decision on the initial accreditation, the NVAO offers the Board of the institution concerned two weeks to put forward its view on the envisaged decision. After the decision on the initial accreditation has been taken, the NVAO immediately forwards it to the Board of the institution concerned whilst at the same time making it public by publishing it on the NVAO website.

It is possible to raise objections (internal appeal) and to lodge an appeal (external appeal):

To raise objections, the affected party must submit a notice of objection to the NVAO within a period of six weeks. The procedure for handling the objection includes a hearing. The NVAO takes a decision within ten weeks after receipt of the notice of objection. The decision concerning the objection can be deferred for a maximum of four weeks. This will be made known in writing.

It is possible to lodge an appeal against a decision concerning an objection taken by the NVAO. The appeal should be lodged with the Administrative Law Division of the Council of State and this within a period of six weeks. In principle, the Administrative Law Division takes its decision within six weeks after the hearing. This period can be extended by a maximum of six weeks.

Pending the objections and/or appeals procedure, the Chairperson of the Administrative Law Division of the Council of State may be requested to take a provisional decision if immediate action is required in view of the interests of parties involved.

**APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTION OF BACHELOR AND MASTER'S LEVELS  
(THE 'DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS')**

	<b>QUALIFICATIONS OF BACHELORS</b>	<b>QUALIFICATIONS OF MASTERS</b>
<b>KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</b>	Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and supersedes their general secondary education, and are typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study	Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context
<b>APPLYING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING</b>	Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study	Can apply their knowledge and understanding and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity
<b>MAKING JUDGEMENTS</b>	Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, academic or ethical issues	Can formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, that rather include reflection on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences	Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously
<b>LEARNING SKILLS</b>	Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy	Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous