

# Quality Agreements

The Quality Agreements are assessed by NVAO. They pertain to the study advance funds allocated to institutions for the improvement of the quality of education.

## GENERAL INFO

In April 2018, the **Minister of Education**, Culture and Science signed an agreement with the higher education sector on the substantiation of the Higher Education Quality Agreements (2019 – 2024). NVAO was requested to assess the agreements.

In the purview of assessing the Quality Agreements, NVAO has developed the “Protocol for the assessment of Quality Agreements 2019-2024”, which addresses three stages:

1. in 2019: assessment of the **plans** in which the institutions specify how they intend to spend their study advance grants;
2. in 2022: assessment of the **realisation** of the plans;
3. from 2023 on: **evaluation** of the realisation of the plans.

The sector agreements contain detailed descriptions of the six domains on which the quality funds may be spent. The domains are outlined below.

More intensive and small-scale education	More and better tutoring	Educational achievement
	Themes for the improvement of educational quality	
Differentiation of education	Appropriate and good educational facilities	Further staff development

In 2019, a panel appointed by NVAO will visit the institutions to assess their plans. In their study advance investment plans, the institutions must specify:

- their intentions with respect to the six educational quality improvement domains set out in the sector agreements;
- the proposed use of instruments and funds, and the organisation and processes within the institution to be used for the realisation of these intentions;
- the involvement of internal stakeholders in drafting the plan, and the support among internal and relevant external stakeholders.

The intentions and goals may apply to the institution as a whole, to specific sections of the institution, or to specific groups of students. The plans must substantiate how their realisation fosters the quality improvement of the education provided.

By no later than 1 April 2020, NVAO will submit its recommendations regarding the plans drawn up by the institutions to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, who is responsible for the allocation of study advance funds.

Assessment of the realisation of the plans is scheduled for the autumn of 2022. NVAO will conduct such assessment on the basis of the annual reports on 2021. The institutions must append a reflection by the participation council to their annual reports. This reflection must address the realisation of the plans, the involvement of stakeholders, and the facilitation that they have received.

The third phase is the evaluation of the realisation of the plans. A panel appointed by NVAO will visit the institutions and review

existing documents (annual reports, reflection by the participation council). The evaluation will take place six years after the assessment of the plans (2025). The evaluation of the plans may be incorporated into an institutional audit. In such cases, the assessment can take place between 2023 and 2026, depending on the timeframe set down for the institutional audits.

After all three assessment stages and following a decision by the Minister, NVAO will publish the panel recommendations and advisory reports on its website. In 2020 and 2022, NVAO will also draw up a national report on the state of affairs.

## STEPS

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### PHASE 1 (2019) ASSESSMENT OF THE PLANS

This step-by-step plan pertains to the assessment of the plans drawn up under the Quality Agreements. This phase is scheduled for 2019. The step-by...

This step-by-step plan pertains to the assessment of the plans drawn up under the Quality Agreements. This phase is scheduled for 2019. The step-by-step plans for the subsequent phases, involving the assessment and evaluation of the realisation of the plans, will follow

2

### SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION DOSSIER TO NVAO

8 weeks before date of site visit (6 weeks if incorporated into institutional audit)

The institution submits the application dossier for the assessment of its plans to NVAO.

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3

### PANEL VISIT

A panel of five members, one of whom is a student, visits the institution. As a minimum, the panel will meet with the participation council, the bo...

A panel of five members, one of whom is a student, visits the institution. As a minimum, the panel will meet with the participation council, the board of supervisors, and the executive board.

4

### ASSESSMENT & PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

After the panel visit, the panel presents its recommendations to the board of NVAO. The panel assesses the plans on the basis of three different cr...

After the panel visit, the panel presents its recommendations to the board of NVAO. The panel assesses the plans on the basis of three different criteria. Its recommendation can be either positive or negative.

5

### BOARD OF NVAO

The panel recommendations are reviewed by the NVAO Executive Board. The NVAO Board subsequently submits a final recommendation to the Minister of E...

The panel recommendations are reviewed by the NVAO Executive Board. The NVAO Board subsequently submits a final recommendation to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. This recommendation can also be either positive or negative.

## DECISION BY THE MINISTER

Ultimately, the Minister takes a decision regarding the quality funding. This decision will be either positive or negative. Upon a negative decision...

Ultimately, the Minister takes a decision regarding the quality funding. This decision will be either positive or negative. Upon a negative decision, the institution concerned will be allowed a term of 1 year to remedy its plans. This term will be followed by another panel visit (see Step 3).

## RATES

NVAO does not charge a fee for the assessment of the Quality Agreements.

## FAQ

### What must I submit to NVAO as a minimum?

The application dossier must clearly explain how an institution plans to spend its quality funding. The explanation must be geared to the six domains outlined in the sector agreements. Institutions are not required to invest in all the domains, but they must state their reasons for choosing or leaving out specific domains. In the purview of a separate assessment of the plan, the panel will need to familiarise itself with an institution's existing philosophy and ambitions. In addition, the panel will need to gain insight into the organisational structure (including relevant decentralisation within the institution) and the associated management culture, the manner in which quality assurance has been embedded, the position of the participation council, and the relations with this council. Insight into the processes in place within the institution is important to enable the panel to assess the plan in terms of the criteria outlined in this protocol. This also provides a picture of the manner in which the selected measures are being implemented and adjusted. The plans of institutions that are undergoing an institutional audit may be assessed as a separate "trail", in addition to the other trails covered in institutional audits (see NVAO Assessment Framework for Institutional Audits).

### What is the deadline for submission of the plan with the Quality Agreements to NVAO?

In the event of a separate assessment, NVAO must receive the plans for the Quality Agreements by no later than 8 weeks before the date of the panel visit. If the Quality Agreements will be assessed during an institutional audit, the institution must submit the Quality Agreements application dossier concurrently with the institutional audit dossier, viz., 6 weeks before the exploratory visit. All the institutions have been notified of the deadline for submission.

### Whom will the panel interview if the funds will be spent in a decentralised manner?

The panel assessment is based on the "follow the money" principle. This means that if the funds are spent in a decentralised manner, the panel will want to interview parties bearing decentralised responsibility (board, participation council).

### How much time will the panel take for its visit to an institution when conducting a separate assessment? And within the context

When conducting a separate assessment, the panel will allow one full day for its visit to the institution. The panel will schedule internal consultations on this day, as well as interviews with the board of the institution, the participation council, and the supervisory board. Brief feedback will be provided at the end of the day. NVAO will forward a visit schedule to the institution.

Assessments within the context of an institutional audit will preferably be conducted at the end of the in-depth visit. To this end, the panel will schedule half a day of interviews (the board of the institution, the participation council, and the supervisory board).

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#### Will the panel want to peruse financial documents?

The panel is not going to check any financial data. However, perusal of financial documents may be useful for the panel in order to assess the feasibility of the plans.

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#### How much leeway do institutions have for interim changes to their plans?

The process allows room for modification of the plans. An institution will need to properly substantiate and coordinate such modifications with its internal stakeholders (and external stakeholders, if any). In its annual reports, such modifications must be clearly set out in order to warrant their traceability.

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#### How does NVAO safeguard the quality of a combined process (assessment of Quality Agreements during an institutional audit)?

The panel conducting the institutional audit will also be trained to assess the Quality Agreements. Furthermore, the panel will already have gained insight into the (educational) philosophy of the institution through the institutional audit.

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#### How is the objectivity of the panel (members) safeguarded?

Panel members are carefully selected and must sign independence and confidentiality statements. A panel commands expertise in the fields of administration, participation, and external assessment (institutional audits). The panel forms an opinion regarding the three standards, based on the application dossier and the interviews. The NVAO process coordinator steers the assessment process in the right direction. Regular coordination consultations between the panel chairs and between NVAO process coordinators ensure the consistency of the assessments.

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#### Will all the Quality Agreements be assessed by the same panel?

For each institution, NVAO convenes a separate panel to assess the Quality Agreements (planning stage). There is a measure of overlap between the panels in order to foster consistency.

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#### What consequences can a negative recommendation entail?

If one or more criteria are scored negatively, NVAO will submit a negative final recommendation to the Minister. In such cases, the Minister will invite the institution for an interview. If the Minister adopts the recommendation and takes a negative decision, the institution will have a term of one year to submit a new plan. NVAO will give another recommendation regarding this new plan. If this recommendation prompts the Minister to take a positive decision regarding the new plan, the institution will be granted quality funding for the years 2021 up to and including 2024. Upon a negative decision regarding the plan submitted following the second chance, quality funding will be denied.

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