

Requirements regarding panel composition within the framework of the accreditation system

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1 Introduction

This document contains a detailed specification of the requirements set regarding the composition of assessment panels in the second stage of the accreditation system. This specification corresponds to the proposed legislation and the revised role of NVAO with regard to the assessment and appointment of panels.

In addition to the text of the accreditation frameworks, the document comprises a procedure for submission, a form to be completed by the institution, a code of conduct for panel members and explanatory notes to the requirements regarding panel composition.

The requirements to be met by assessment panels have been formulated along the lines of the requirements set for such panels in the European higher education context. The European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA), the umbrella organisation of (inter)national quality agencies and accreditation organisations, has drawn up guidelines to that end which have been laid down in the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" ("European Standards and Guidelines"; ESG). The document at hand, *Requirements regarding panel composition in the new accreditation system in the Netherlands*, is in fact an adaptation of the above guidelines for the Dutch higher education sector.

2 Composition of the assessment panel¹

It is imperative that assessment panels are composed in a manner allowing meaningful discussions among peers, in which the panel remains sufficiently independent. The institution convenes the panel, appoints a secretary and subsequently presents the panel to NVAO for approval. To that end, the institution provides data on the expertise and independence of the panel members and the secretary, in a manner stipulated by NVAO. The institution may also commission an external quality assessment agency to convene a panel; in such cases the panel must also be presented to NVAO for approval.

The panel secretary has been certified following the completion of a NVAO training course. Every year, NVAO publishes a list of secretaries it has certified.

Assessment panels must meet the following requirements.

1. The panel is composed of a minimum of four members, among whom at least two authoritative experts in the field² and a student;
2. Overall, the panel commands the following expertise:
 - a. expertise regarding developments in the discipline,
 - b. international expertise,
 - c. practical expertise in the professional field relevant to the programme (if applicable),
 - d. experience in teaching or educational development at the relevant programme level and expertise regarding the teaching format(s) used in the programme³,
 - e. student-related expertise,
 - f. assessment or audit expertise.
3. The panel is independent (its members have not had any ties with the institution providing the programme for at least the past five years).
4. The panel is assisted by an independent, external secretary trained and certified by NVAO. The secretary does not sit on the panel.⁴

Prior to the visit, all panel members and the secretary certify to not maintaining any connections or ties with the institution in question, either as a private individual, or as a researcher / teacher, professional or consultant, which could affect an independent judgement of the quality of the programme in either a positive or a negative sense and to not having had such connections or ties with the institution during the past five years.

In addition to the factual independence, as expressed above in the nature of the relationship and the number of years, it is essential for any panel member or secretary to feel independent.

¹ This paragraph has been quoted from the "Assessment frameworks for the accreditation system" dated 12 October 2010.

² Expertise in the field comprises specialist expertise, international expertise or practical expertise in the professional field.

³ This includes, for example, distance learning, work-related courses, flexible education, skill-oriented education or education aimed at excellent students.

⁴ For initial accreditations, panels are convened and secretaries appointed by NVAO.

In some cases, independence of more than five years may not provide sufficient guarantee for an independent position; a prospective panel member or secretary could still experience too strong a relationship with the institution or, for example, be involved too closely with an institution or programme because of family ties. In such cases, the prospective panel member or secretary cannot sit on the panel. Panel membership requires a professional attitude. To that end, NVAO has formulated a code of conduct for panel members and secretaries. This code of conduct encompasses elements pertaining to the independence, confidentiality and attitude of the panel members and the secretary during the assessment process.

Panel members and secretaries will sign a declaration of independence and confidentiality prior to the assessment process. In this declaration, they attest to having taken note of the code of conduct. Following the assessment process, the chair and secretary sign the assessment report once all panel members have read and approved the report. The report includes a declaration that the assessment has been carried out independently.

Stakeholders such as panel members, staff or students may report to NVAO any matters arising during the assessment process that could affect the independence of the assessment or that pertain to other complaints regarding the panels and secretaries.

3 Procedure for submission of the panel composition

The institution submits a proposal for the composition of a panel to NVAO, using the forms included in these guidelines. NVAO will not consider any nominations without a completed form.

An institution may also commission a quality assessment agency to convene a panel for the assessment of an existing programme. In such cases, the panel must also be presented to NVAO for approval. Any assessment agency nominating a panel must be authorised in writing by the institution. The assessment agency will notify NVAO in writing of the institution's agreement with the composition of the panel. The authorisation and the agreement on the composition of the panel will be appended to the nomination.

In principle, NVAO will judge the panel composition within four weeks. Any doubts or comments on its part regarding the panel must first be clarified. If need be, the panel composition will have to be modified. Institutions must realise that the planning of the visit may be delayed in such cases.

4 Justification form for the expertise and independence of the assessment panel

I. Basic data regarding the programme

Administrative data concerning the programme

1. Nomenclature of the programme as in CROHO;
2. Orientation and level of the programme;
3. If applicable: related Associate Degree programme(s);
4. Degree;
5. Specialisations / "tracks";
6. Educational format(s)⁵;
7. Number of credits;
8. Location(s);
9. Mode(s) of study;
10. CROHO registration number.

Administrative data concerning the institution

1. Name of institution.

Administrative data concerning assessment of the programme

1. Type of programme assessment (extensive or limited);
2. Distinctive feature (if any).

II. List of panel members

Name (including title(s))	Role (chair / member / student-member)	Expert in the field (yes / no)
1.	Chair	
2.	Member	
3.	Member	
4.	Student-member	
5.		

III. Secretary /Co-ordinator ⁶

Name (including title(s))	Certified on (date)	Email address
1.		
2.		

⁵ This refers to, for example, distance learning, workplace-related teaching, flexible teaching, competence-oriented education or education for excellent students.

⁶ See Appendix 2: Certification of secretaries / co-ordinators.

IV. Brief job descriptions for the panel members (1 line)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

V. List of expertise within the panel⁷

Expertise	The expertise is demonstrated by:
a. Expertise regarding the developments within the discipline;	
b. International expertise;	
c. Practical expertise in the professional field relevant to the programme;	
d. Recent experience in teaching or educational development at the relevant level (bachelor's or master's) and with the relevant orientation (professional or academic); expertise regarding the educational format(s) practised by the programme ⁸ ;	
e. Review or audit expertise;;	
f. Student-related expertise.	

Appendix 1: Curricula vitae of the panel members, stating, as a minimum, education and training received and relevant work experience

Appendix 2: Independence and Confidentiality form to be signed by the panel members and the secretary prior to the assessment process

⁷ The secretary does not sit on the panel.

⁸ This refers to, for example, distance learning, workplace-related teaching, flexible teaching, competence-oriented education or education for excellent students.

5 Independence and confidentiality form, to be submitted prior to the assessment process

Programme assessment

Declaration of independence and confidentiality, prior to the assessment process

The undersigned (name and home address)

has been asked to assess the following programme(s) as an expert / secretary:

Application submitted by institution:

- hereby certifies to not maintaining any (family) connections or ties of a personal nature or as a researcher / teacher, professional or consultant with the above institution, which could affect a fully independent judgement regarding the quality of the programme in either a positive or a negative sense;
- hereby certifies to not having maintained such connections or ties with the institution during the past five years;
- for clustered assessments: hereby certifies to not having maintained such connections or ties with the institutions during the past five years;
- certifies to observing strict confidentiality with regard to all that has come and will come to his/her notice in connection with the assessment, insofar as such confidentiality can reasonably be claimed by the programme, the institution or NVAO;
- hereby certifies to being acquainted with the NVAO code of conduct.

Place: Date:

Signature:

6 NVAO Code of Conduct

Preparation and procedure

1. The chair, the panel members and the secretary thoroughly prepare for the preliminary meeting and the site visit by studying all the relevant documents and responding to the proposed visit schedule.
2. The chair, the panel members and the secretary base their assessment on the applicable NVAO assessment framework and act along the lines of this framework.
3. The chair, the panel members and the secretary adhere to the time frames set and agreements made.
4. The secretary draws up a draft report in accordance with the applicable NVAO assessment framework, factoring in the panel's judgements.
5. The panel members respond to the draft report.
6. The panel secretary and the panel chair process the responses. All panel members and the secretary examine and endorse the report. Subsequently, the report is signed by the panel chair and the panel secretary.

Independence and confidentiality

1. The chair, the panel members and the secretary have no affiliations with the institution / programme to be assessed.
2. The chair, the panel members and the secretary have the right to inspect all the relevant documents and visit specific locations.
3. Wherever confidentiality is called for, all panel members and the secretary will deal with documents made available and information regarding the institution / programme in a confidential manner.
4. In its declaration of independence and confidentiality, the panel commits to confidentiality in dealing with the data it has been provided with.
5. Following the assessment process, the chair, the panel members and the secretary, if so requested, will inform the Board of NVAO regarding their findings during the assessment.
6. During the assessment process, the chair, the panel members and the secretary will not provide any information to the programme / institution regarding their findings during the assessment, other than the feedback provided by the chair at the end of the visit or in the assessment report.

Professional attitude towards the institution / programme

1. The chair, the panel members and the secretary respect the identity and the nature of the institution / programme.
2. The chair, panel members and the secretary adopt a businesslike yet open and approachable attitude. A pleasant and relaxed atmosphere is conducive to the outcomes of the visit.
3. The manner in which questions are presented and the subjects to be addressed will be geared to the discussion partners. Lengthy introductions will be avoided; the questions will be open-ended and preferably short. Some measure of tenacity through in-depth questions is desirable; however, within reason.

4. The documentation to be requested will be limited to what is essential. (Administrative) inconvenience for the institution / programme will be avoided.
5. The chair, the panel members and the secretary operate with maximum objectivity, impartiality and factuality. They will refrain from voicing their own opinions in their meetings with the institution / programme. Each panel member's individual views are subordinate to the panel's common view.
6. The chair, the panel members and the secretary will operate in a conscientious manner; they will distinguish between desirability and reality; they will consult multiple sources and substantiate deviations. They will refrain from jumping to conclusions.
7. The chair, the panel members and the secretary have an eye for both the strengths and the points for attention of the institution / programme. These are identified in the assessment report. However, a structural provision of recommendations or solutions to the institution / programme will be avoided.

Attitude within the panel

1. The chair, the panel members and the secretary are open to feedback.
2. All interactions within the panel will be conducted with respect for each individual's contributions.

7 Appendix 1: Expertise among panel members

In addition to the independence requirement, NVAO distinguishes the following essential expertise to be represented in the panel:

- Specialist expertise;
- International expertise;
- Practical expertise;
- Educational expertise;
- Review or audit expertise;
- Student-related expertise.

The requirements to be met by each category of expertise are outlined below. Subsequently, the differences in the requirements are indicated for each level and orientation.

- *Specialist expertise* refers directly to the insight into the state of the art of (curricula in) the (constituting) discipline(s). A specialist expert has taught in a similar or related programme with the same orientation and contributes to the development of the professional practice, the discipline and/or the field of study. This is demonstrated by conference contributions and/or publications in (trade) journals and/or a leading role in professional organisations. The specialist expert commands authority in and current knowledge of his/her own field, which is demonstrated by: a (university) degree, executive positions, manifest recognition as a peer or professional, leading publications / text books, awards, etcetera. The following qualify: senior teachers, associate professors or professors, but also active researchers within a profession.
- *International expertise* is present in the panel if the panel is capable of drawing substantive comparisons with related programmes abroad whose orientation and level are similar and, insofar as applicable, the panel has insight into the requirements set by the international professional practice for graduates. The latter form of international expertise is important for programmes with a social impact and is mandatory for the assessment of programmes preparing students for an international field of action. For example, a panel member may have insight into the requirements set by the international professional practice through an appointment with a foreign or multinational employer or with an international organisation, with additional international activities or managerial experience with an international trade or umbrella organisation.
- *Practical expertise* is vital in programmes with a professional orientation. The practical expert preferably commands a proper overview of the requirements set by the professional field for graduates, for example, by being involved in sector organisations or holding an executive position with a major or typical employer. Insight into the requirements of the professional field can be enhanced by a contribution to the debate on job profiles of graduates.
- *Review or audit expertise* can be distinguished into (a) experience in the practical application of requirements set by the discipline (peer), (b) experience with external

assessment procedures in the higher education sector (review experience) and (c) knowledge of the NVAO assessment framework and the accreditation procedure. A combination of this expertise must be present in the panel.

- *Educational expertise* is found among experts with recent teaching experience or experience in designing and managing programmes and among educationalists. With regard to educational expertise, it is important to ascertain that the expert in question has sufficient affinity with the teaching concept of the programme to be assessed. In order to achieve a meaningful exchange among peers, it is also important that the educational expertise relate to the same orientation (professional or academic) as that of the programme to be assessed. Educational expertise may be represented by the panel's *specialist expert*, for example when the specialist expert has been or is responsible for an education portfolio in his/her work.

It is possible that a single panel member commands various types of expertise. In such cases, it is important to state how these forms of expertise have been acquired. For example, by combining a relevant profession and a (substantial) teaching assignment within the field in question.

- *Student-related expertise* focuses primarily on assessing the significance of the plans and the quality achieved for the students enrolled in the programme. The student panel member ascertains whether students are provided with sufficient support / guidance and facilities. Student panel members enrolled in a programme within the same discipline also try to answer the question of whether the education provided is of sufficient quality in terms of content. A prospective panel member is deemed to command student-related expertise until one year after his/her graduation (bachelor's or master's degree) at the time of the panel's nomination to NVAO.

A number of differences according to orientation (professional / academic) and level (bachelor's / master's) are outlined below.

Bachelor's programmes, professional orientation

- Practical expertise is represented.
- Specialist expertise is present, focused on teaching experience in related programmes with a professional orientation and a contribution to the development of the professional practice.
- International expertise is relevant for the assessment of the programme.

Master's programmes, professional orientation

- Professional field is represented.
- Master's programmes contribute to the development of the discipline. For that reason, the emphasis is placed on specialist expertise, topical relevant research and academic and professional authority, for example, by including one or two professors or associate professors in the panel. The panel comprises at least one doctor, active in the same or a related research domain at a research university. The specialist experts are actively engaged in publishing in the domain under consideration. All panel members have completed at least a master's level education.
- International expertise is relevant for the assessment of the programme. This expertise concerns insight into the structure of foreign curricula and is acquired by a recent teaching position held for several years at a similar or related programme

abroad or contributions to international projects focused on learning outcomes (such as the Tuning project).

Bachelor's and master's programmes, academic orientation

- For many academic programmes, it is important to pay sufficient attention to the representation of the professional field, in addition to the academic orientation.
- The key area of focus is the academic / disciplinary orientation. The experts are authoritative peers, as reflected by their positions as professors and their scientific credibility, which is demonstrated by credibility indicators such as awards, editorships, funding, publications in A journals, membership of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), etcetera. Bachelor's and master's programmes with an academic orientation are assessed by leading scientists with sufficient educational experience. Authoritative peers will nearly always command sufficient international expertise and experience.
- International expertise is relevant for the assessment of the programme. This expertise concerns insight into the structure of foreign curricula and, with regard to master's programmes, is acquired by a recent teaching position held for several years at a similar or related programme abroad or contributions to international projects focused on learning outcomes (such as the Tuning project).

8 Appendix 2: Certification of secretaries / co-ordinators

“Certification” refers to inclusion on a list of NVAO approved secretaries / co-ordinators. Inclusion on this list is a prerequisite for approval of a panel by NVAO.

Provisional certification is awarded on the basis of active participation in and completion of training courses. After a year, an evaluation by NVAO will determine whether the certification can be finalised. A certificate is valid for one year. Once a year, the secretaries are required to participate in a refresher course or intervision meeting in order to renew their certificate. Inadequate performance or doubts will constitute reason for consultations with NVAO. During these consultations, measures for improvement may be agreed upon, which may include additional training.

The training courses focus on an explanation of the aims of the new assessment framework, its application and the reports (in particular, the summary judgement contained therein). A training course encompasses sessions pertaining to the new accreditation framework and the reports. There are no separate training courses for co-ordinators; the requirements for co-ordinators are the same as those that apply for secretaries. The courses may be designed to focus on both or either one of these types of activities.

Two types of training course are provided: A for programme assessments; B for institutional assessments.

An A training certificate is mandatory for admission to B training.

8.1 Tasks and competences

Report

A secretary is expected to write a report that meets the requirements set by NVAO, irrespective of the methods observed by a quality assessment agency so far.

The report must be:

- well-structured;
The text must be free from overlaps or repetitions. A clear distinction must be made between the findings and the considerations underlying the judgement.
- transparent;
It must be clear how the panel arrived at its judgement: critical views and recommendations are weighed against positive findings.
- conclusive;
The report must present clear conclusions.
- well-balanced;
The report must pay equal attention to the various aspects. Reports must not be dominated by “hobbyhorses”.
- consistent;
The panel's findings and considerations must not be contradictory.
- coherent;
The report does not merely enumerate the facts; the text follows a certain line.
- concise;
The report is limited to the essence yet sufficiently concrete and relevant.

- concrete;
The reader must be able to form a picture of the programme or, as the case may be, the institution based on factual data.
- relevant;
The report must contain sufficient information on the points listed in the standards and others that appear to be relevant to the quality of the programme. Relevance is not limited to the standards but does justice to the specific situation.
- justified;
The origin of the information underpinning the findings must be clear. Abbreviations must be accounted for in the text and listed separately.
- clear;
The language used enhances the reader's comprehension. Both positive and negative elements are presented in clear and unequivocal wording.
- well-readable;
The text must make quick and easy reading. No verbose sentences.
- well-written;
The text must be written in smooth and flawless Dutch or English, in a formal style.
- carefully edited;
Careful attention must be paid to the lay-out of the report.
- accurate;
Names, degrees, numbers, numbering and composition of the report must be correct.

Summary

In order to foster efficient processing by NVAO, each report must be provided with an outline summary, spanning two A4 pages, which can be read independently of the report. The summary must contain sufficient information for NVAO to use as underpinning for its decision. In addition, the summary must contain sufficient information specific to the programme to enable students, parents and employers to form a picture of the programme.

Process

A secretary must monitor the progress of the process as outlined in the assessment framework, irrespective of the method observed by a quality assessment agency so far. In addition, NVAO expects secretaries to fulfil the following tasks.

A secretary:

- ensures that the panel is provided with the required information, to a sufficient extent;
- ensures that no information will be exchanged with the institution, either prior to or during the process, other than what is required in accordance with the procedures laid down in the assessment framework;
- ensures that all panel members have had the opportunity to comment on the draft report;
- processes these comments in consultation with the chair;
- ensures that all panel members have had the opportunity to agree on the final version of the report;
- ensures that the institution has had the opportunity to respond to *factual* inaccuracies. Institutions must expressly not influence the tone, considerations or judgements of the panel.

Skills

A secretary must command the following skills.

A secretary:

- has a proper understanding of the assessment framework concerned;
- is able to instruct the panel members with regard to the assessment framework and the code of conduct;
- can support the chair during the preliminary talks and draws up a report on the preliminary meeting;
- is able to draw up a list of questions, following the preliminary meeting, geared to the various groups of discussion partners;
- is able to scan documents “diagonally” and quickly;
- can support panel members in going through material that has been made available;
- knows when matters require clarification for the benefit of the report and requests such clarification during the meetings;
- manages to maintain a proper balance between “following” and “steering”;
- can advise the panel during the process in such a way that correct and sufficient information is gathered on all relevant aspects to be included in the report;
- can support the panel in the progress of the site visits (during breaks);
- manages to maintain a proper balance between “closeness” and “distance” with regard to the panel members;
- manages to create an atmosphere of courtesy, without becoming too familiar.