

NVAO
Mr K.L.L.M. Dittrich
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O N D E R
U C S U M
L T U R
N E T E M
S C H A P

The Hague
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Ref.
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Subject
Verification of NQF-HE by external panel of experts

Appendix
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Dear Mr Dittrich,

in view of the forthcoming external verification of the Dutch National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF-HE) by an independent international panel of experts, I would like to outline hereby the steps to the realisation of this document as well as the state of its implementation in Dutch higher education institutions. The verification of the National Qualifications Framework by the expert panel will complement and finalise a process of communication with Higher Education institutions and other relevant stakeholders concerning the learning outcomes of higher education programmes. I herewith send you the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF-HE). By this letter I confirm our earlier request to the NVAO to verify the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. I would also like to request the NVAO to publish the NQF-HE on the NVAO web site after validation and to maintain the NQF-HE in the coming years.

Design and implementation of the NQF-HE at institutional and/or programme level

Following the Bologna declaration of 1999, the Bachelor's–Master's structure was legally introduced in 2002 after a consultation period regarding policy documents on a new three-cycle degree structure and on quality assurance. For the transition to the Bachelor's-Master's system, draft end-level descriptors had been developed in terms of learning outcomes for the first and second cycles. (The descriptors for the third cycle and the short cycle were added later.)

Given the European context, these were compared with draft level descriptors that had been developed in countries/communities with comparable quality assurance systems. This comparison gave rise to what is called the "joint quality initiative" and to the "Dublin descriptors". These shared generic descriptors came to the fore as common elements in the level descriptors that were compared at the time (see www.jointquality.org agenda). Thus, in 2003 the "Dublin descriptors" were introduced into the Dutch Quality Assurance Framework as reference points for the level of Higher Education programmes.

In 2005, the Dublin descriptors were integrated into the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), which was adopted by the ministerial conference in Bergen 2005. At the same time, it was agreed to develop National Qualifications Frameworks in line with the overarching QF-EHEA.

Consultation with stakeholders and decision to start the development of the Dutch NQF-HE.

In October 2004, when the Overarching Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area was proposed to be put on the agenda of the Bologna process Ministers meeting in Bergen in 2005, a seminar was scheduled in the Netherlands. This seminar was conducted in the ministry and chaired by the Secretary of State for Higher Education. The principals of all higher education Institutions, both publicly and privately funded, were invited. Topics on the agenda were the employability of graduates and the concept of the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The outcome of that meeting was that the principals understood the intention and meaning of the QF-EHEA and agreed that it would be adopted by the ministers in the forthcoming ministerial meeting. As this framework was in principle in line with developments at Dutch higher education institutions, the QF-EHEA was welcomed.

Agenda-setting and organisation of the process

After adoption of the QF-EHEA, the way to proceed with the development of the NQF-HE in the Netherlands was agreed in the already existing committee directing the implementation of the Bologna process in the Netherlands. That committee is chaired and facilitated by the Ministry of OCW. It further consists of the representatives of higher education institutions (academically-oriented university education, universities of applied sciences and privately funded providers of higher education), representatives of the student unions, the quality assurance agency (the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, NVAO), employers and employee organisations and a representative from the team of Bologna experts. A working group consisting of representatives of the ministry, the universities and the universities of applied sciences and the NVAO was formed to produce a draft NQF. The draft was offered to the Bologna steering committee for comments. After the steering committee validated and verified an amended version, the draft NQF was put to the test of all higher education institutions in a seminar in the ministry in October 2007. The draft has since then been publicly available.

During that seminar, those present agreed that this NQF represents the Dutch higher education system, with a few textual comments still being taken into consideration. Those present agreed that the NQF-HE is ready and will be further implemented. Further implementation emphasises the set up of programmes in terms of learning outcomes and the reflection of the learning outcomes as well as the level of the qualification with reference to the overarching QF-EHEA in the student's Diploma Supplement.

Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF-HE and quality assurance.

Besides the Bachelor's and Master's qualifications, other qualifications included in the Dutch NQF-HE are Doctoral degrees, Associate degrees, Design Engineer's and Medical Specialist's degrees.

The generic descriptors for the end levels of the Bachelor's, Master's and Associate degree qualifications are the "Dublin descriptors" of the QF-EHEA, which have been incorporated into the accreditation framework of the NVAO. The NVAO ensures the quality of these qualifications.

The generic "Dublin descriptors" for the doctorate level and the Dutch generic descriptor for the doctorate level, as laid down in the university policy document "*Hora est*" (VSNU 2004), have been developed in congruence with each other and are very similar. University committees ensure the quality of the Doctoral degree.

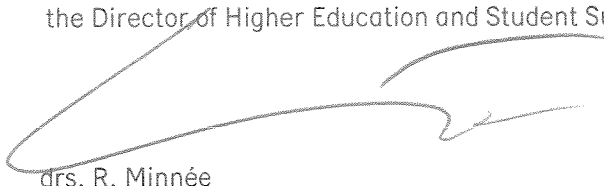
The qualifications for Design Engineers and Medical Specialists have been incorporated in the NQF, as established qualifications beyond the Master's level. The quality of these qualifications is up to the present ensured by professional bodies.

Approval

The above-mentioned consultations with the Dutch Higher Education Institutions have been rather unusual processes concerning policy dialogues on higher education in the Netherlands. Regular policy consultations usually take place between the Ministry and the representative bodies of the Universities (VSNU), the Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad) and the privately funded education institutions (PAEPON). Therefore, it was also considered appropriate to follow this regular procedure with regard to the development of the NQF. Thus, in addition to directly involving all principals of higher education institutions, the regular consultation procedure between the ministry and the above-mentioned bodies was also followed. By October 2008, these bodies formally agreed that the presentation in the NQF is correct and that the institutions adhere to the principles set out in it. Hence, this verification by external peers is welcomed.

Wishing you fruitful meetings in the process of external verification and looking forward to the outcome,

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science,
the Director of Higher Education and Student Support,



drs. R. Minnée