Institutional review

All the institutions in Flanders that are recognised as a university college or university are periodically subjected to an institutional review. The institutional review assesses whether a higher education institution pursues its educational policy in a qualitative manner, including the conduct for confirming the quality of its programmes. A positive outcome, conditional or otherwise, will result in the extension of the accreditation periods of the accredited programmes provided by the institution. Following a negative institutional review, NVAO will once more assume responsibility for assuring the quality of each programme.

For each institution, NVAO sets down the deadline for submission of the application dossier, based on the Institutional Review Calendar for 2019-2025, which is established in consultation with the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR).

GENERAL INFO

The institutional review is mandatory for all the institutions in Flanders that are recognised as a university college or university and is conducted every six years according to a fixed calendar. The institutional review verifies the quality of the educational policy pursued by a higher education institution, including the control it exerts over the assurance of the quality of its programmes. Such control covers the aggregate actions, processes, practices, procedures, and instruments that enable the institution to assure the quality of its programmes.

The assessment is conducted by a review panel of independent experts. The panel checks how the educational policy in place ties in with the educational philosophy of the institution and the societal challenges it is facing within its own context. It examines how the institution ensures the effectiveness of its educational policy; in other words, how the institution pursues attainment of the pre-defined goals. The panel also checks whether and how the institution is assuring the quality of individual programmes through the control it exerts.

In all the aspects of the institutional review, specific attention is focused on the quality culture in place within the institution. A quality culture is an organisational culture in which continuous quality assurance and quality improvement is pursued by all the stakeholders of their own accord.

STEPS

1

PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS (OPTIONAL)

No later than three months before the stipulated deadline for submission of the application dossier

In the build-up to the official application, the institution may conduct preliminary consultations with NVAO, up to three months before the stipula...

In the build-up to the official application, the institution may conduct preliminary consultations with NVAO, up to three months before the stipulated submission date of the application dossier, to confer on the timing and steps in the procedure, the profile of the assessment panel and the combination of expertise commanded by the members, and the structure of the Critical Reflection.

2

CRITICAL REFLECTION

The institution draws up a Critical Reflection. In essence, the Critical Reflection answers the question as to how the institution is monitoring th...
The institution draws up a Critical Reflection. In essence, the Critical Reflection answers the question as to how the institution is monitoring the quality of its education within the relevant societal and international context, and how it is involving its stakeholders, external peers, and external experts in this process. In its report, the institution refers to verifiable facts and underlying documents, and provides striking examples. The Critical Reflection is a self-contained document that can be read independently.

3

APPLICATION

In accordance with the fixed Institutional Review Calendar (in collaboration with VLUHR)

For each institution, NVAO sets down the deadline for submission of the application dossier, based on the calendar which is established in consulta...
For each institution, NVAO sets down the deadline for submission of the application dossier, based on the calendar which is established in consultation with the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR). The application is submitted via the digital application form (see tab Submission of Applications); it comprises an application letter signed by the board of the institution and the Critical Reflection prepared by the institution.

4

VERIFICATION OF ADMISSIBILITY OF THE APPLICATION

Notification regarding admissibility no later than 15 calendar days after receipt of the application

NVAO will check the admissibility of the application. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a tim...
NVAO will check the admissibility of the application. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a timeframe of fifteen calendar days.

5

COMPOSITION OF THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

The quality assurance system of Flanders revolves around peer review. An assessment panel comprises a minimum of five experts; it is supported by a...
The quality assurance system of Flanders revolves around peer review. An assessment panel comprises a minimum of five experts; it is supported by a secretary and an NVAO process coordinator. The latter two do not sit on the panel. In order to be able to take the context of the institution into account, NVAO always involves the institution in the composition of a panel. In order to warrant an objective and fair assessment, the panel must be able to work independently of the institution. This means that over the five years prior to the appointment of the panel, its members must not have had any connections or ties with the institution. All the panel members, the secretary, and the process coordinator must sign a code of deontology. NVAO informs the board of the institution regarding the panel composition. The institution has the right to lodge a substantiated appeal to the panel composition within a timeframe of fifteen calendar days. In addition, the institution is required to inform NVAO, within that same timeframe, of any information it has regarding the expertise and independence of panel members.

6

EXPLORATORY SITE VISIT (OPTIONAL)

In order to further refine the picture that the panel has of the institution and the context in which it operates, the institution may allow the pa...
In order to further refine the picture that the panel has of the institution and the context in which it operates, the institution may allow the panel to conduct an exploratory site visit.

7 IN-DEPTH SITE VISIT

NVAO schedules each site visit in consultation with the institution. Each site visit is coordinated with the panel chair. After reading the Critica...

NVAO schedules each site visit in consultation with the institution. Each site visit is coordinated with the panel chair. After reading the Critical Reflection, the panel indicates the additional topics it wishes to address. Once the schedule is finalised, the institution may indicate the positions for which it is proposing discussion partners. Participants may take part in multiple interviews. The panel is allowed a minimum period of six weeks to peruse the Critical Reflection and the related documents. Each individual panel member then formulates an initial impression regarding the institution, based on the documents perused. The in-depth site visit is substantiated on the basis of several review trails that provide answers to the research questions of the panel. The panel must submit its final research proposal to the institution no later than nine weeks before the in-depth site visit. The panel determines the duration of the in-depth site visit on the basis of the research it needs to conduct on-site in order to arrive at its assessment recommendations. The in-depth site visit covers a maximum of three days. The panel must substantiate the duration in its report. If it has not conducted an exploratory site visit, the panel members must allow sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the context of the institution. The panel members and the discussion partners of the institution are given the opportunity to get to know one another during an informal meet-and-greet at the start of the (first) visit. This opportunity fosters the dialogue and enables the panel members to form a picture of the (informal) quality culture. At the end of the in-depth visit, the institution and the panel share the basic ideas of the insights acquired.

8 ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT

In its assessment report, the panel advises NVAO on the decision to be taken regarding the institutional review. Its recommendations are based on t...

In its assessment report, the panel advises NVAO on the decision to be taken regarding the institutional review. Its recommendations are based on the assessment scale and assessment rules as set out in the assessment framework. The structure of the report is determined by the research conducted by the panel. Consequently, the report comprises a linear account of the research with the factually substantiated findings, considerations, and insights of the panel. It explicitly indicates what is going well within the institution and analyses its strengths and success factors. It identifies opportunities and challenges, and substantiates points for attention and recommendations. The draft assessment report is forwarded to NVAO within four weeks after the in-depth site visit. NVAO assesses the internal consistency of the report and the feasibility of the recommendations; if need be, it will suggest adjustments to the panel to clarify the findings or enhance the substantiation of the recommendations. Ownership of the assessment report remains vested with the panel. NVAO forwards the draft assessment report to the institution no later than two months before expiry of the timeframe for decision-making. The board of the institution is given a term of fifteen calendar days to formulate comments. Wherever necessary, the drafts are amended, whereupon the assessment report is definitively endorsed by the panel. The panel is obliged to respond in writing to the board of the institution regarding any factual inaccuracies identified.

9 DECISION BY NVAO

12 months after the application

NVAO takes a decision regarding the institutional review in accordance with the assessment scale and assessment rules in the assessment framework. ...

NVAO takes a decision regarding the institutional review in accordance with the assessment scale and assessment rules in the assessment framework. The approved draft decision and the underlying report are forwarded to the institution, whereupon the board of the institution is allowed a term of fifteen calendar days to lodge an appeal to NVAO. If no appeal is lodged within the stipulated timeframe, the decision is final. Following the decision-making procedure, NVAO will publish the decision and the underlying assessment report on its website and forward both documents to the Education Minister of Flanders.

RATES

Once the application has been found admissible, the institution will receive a request for full payment of the cost price of the institutional review.

The fee applicable to this procedure is fixed by the Education Minister of Flanders. It covers the costs entailed in the work performed by the panel members (remuneration, travel expenses, hotel accommodation, et cetera), which are paid by NVAO.

The rate for an institutional review is calculated based on the number of students (without joint-programmes):

Number of students	Rate
<1.500	25.934 euro
1.500-3.000	38.901 euro
3.001-30.000	56.406 euro
>30.000	72.615 euro

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