Institutional audit

An institutional audit is a periodic, external, and independent assessment of the internal quality assurance in place at an institution. Internal quality assurance comprises both the quality culture and the internal quality assurance system of an institution. The audit serves to verify that the institution's internal quality assurance system, in interconnection with its quality culture, safeguards the realisation of its individual vision of good education.

GENERAL INFO

The second round of institutional audits commenced in 2017. The first round ran from 2011 to 2016.

The second round will be focused on assessing the robustness of the institutions' quality assurance systems and the associated procedures, and whether a sustained quality culture has been established within the institutions. In that case, a positive score on all the standards will confirm trust in the institution. Institutional audits do not qualify the quality of the programmes; their quality is assessed separately.

The accreditation system is in keeping with the governance philosophy of the government, under which institutions are autonomous, enjoy confidence, and are held to account vis-à-vis the government and society. In a wider societal context, a tendency can be observed towards enhanced autonomy and ownership, but also towards transparency and accountability. The institutional audit ties in with this tendency and expressly takes an institution's own ambitions, views, and choices as its points of departure, yet holds the institution to account regarding the realisation of its ambitions.

The key question to be answered by the panel is: "Is the institution's quality assurance system safeguarding the realisation of its vision of good education, and is the institution continuously working on development and improvement?" The audit focuses on four coherent questions:

1. Are the institution's vision and policy concerning the quality of the education it provides widely supported and sufficiently coordinated, both externally and internally?
2. How does the institution realise this vision of quality?
3. How does the institution monitor that its vision of quality is realised?
4. How does the institution work on improvement?

Institutions are not new to the concepts of quality culture and quality assurance systems. In order to meet the current requirements regarding transparency, the institutions have further developed and elaborated their internal quality assurance in a manner geared to their own culture, position, ambitions, and the expectations of stakeholders.

The organisation and successful completion of an institutional audit is a labour-intensive procedure which takes an average of one year.

STEPS

1

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION

(1 year before expiry of the validity of the previous institutional audit or before the desired completion date)
The institution submits an application to NVAO. In this application, it also states the Framework under which it wishes to be assessed and the rele...

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2

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NVAO contacts the institution. The philosophy, intended panel composition, and practical planning are discussed during an initial consultation with...

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3

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSULTATIONS

(Following coordination with panel members and scheduling a date for the site visit)

The two administrators responsible and the NVAO process coordinator meet with the board of the institution, the project leader, and representatives...

The two administrators responsible and the NVAO process coordinator meet with the board of the institution, the project leader, and representatives of the institution's participation council to discuss the application. The Accreditation Report is also discussed during this meeting. After this meeting, the NVAO administrators withdraw from the procedure until the decision-making stage.

4

PREPARATION OF FIRST SITE VISIT

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NVAO has a draft schedule for the first site visit, the exploratory visit. The institution is free to further substantiate the schedule as it sees fit. The point of departure is conducting interviews with a wide range of stakeholders in order to gain as broad a picture of the institution as possible. The schedule must eventually be approved by the panel. No later than six weeks before the first visit, the institution must forward its self-evaluation report to the panel.

5

FIRST SITE VISIT

This is a two-day visit. At the end of the visit, the panel provides feedback regarding the trails to be considered during the in-depth visit.

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6

PREPARATION OF SECOND SITE VISIT

The NVAO process coordinator prepares the second site visit – the in-depth visit – in collaboration with the institution's project leader and in co...

The NVAO process coordinator prepares the second site visit – the in-depth visit – in collaboration with the institution's project leader and in consultation with the panel chair.

7

THE NVAO PROCESS COORDINATOR PREPARES THE SECOND SITE VISIT –

THE IN-DEPTH VISIT – IN COLLABORATION WITH THE INSTITUTION'S PROJE

This is a three-day visit. At the end of the visit, the panel provides brief feedback regarding its findings, considerations, and conclusions, and ...
This is a three-day visit. At the end of the visit, the panel provides brief feedback regarding its findings, considerations, and conclusions, and the recommendation they will submit to the board of NVAO.

8

DRAFT REPORT

The draft report is forwarded to the institution in order to check for any factual inaccuracies. The institution is allowed two weeks to respond.
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9

DECISION-MAKING

The intended decision is submitted to the Executive Board of NVAO, along with the report. NVAO takes a decision on the basis of the recommendations...
The intended decision is submitted to the Executive Board of NVAO, along with the report. NVAO takes a decision on the basis of the recommendations submitted by the assessment panel. The intended decision is forwarded to the institution in order to check for any factual inaccuracies. The institution is allowed two weeks to respond. Subsequently, the final decision is forwarded to the institution.

10

PUBLICATION AND COMPLETION

NVAO publishes the decision and the report on its website. Upon request of the institution, the decision will be handed over in person.
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11

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATIONS

Institutions that have completed the institutional audit procedure with a positive or conditionally positive result may have their existing and new...
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RATES

In 2026, the rate for the Institutional Audit amounts to €43,708. For small institutions with fewer than four programmes, the rate amounts to €21,854.

Different rates apply to other or non-standard procedures. Costs related to foreign site visits or the engagement of external experts, consultancy services, or additional requirements will be charged separately.

In the case of accreditation under conditions, NVAO will invoice the costs associated with the deployment and activities of the panel and the secretary. These costs depend on the manner in which the conditional assessment is conducted.

If an application for an Institutional Audit is withdrawn, the following residual rates apply in 2026:

- €6,000 – prior to the start of the panel activities;
- €12,500 – prior to the site visits;
- €43,708 – after the site visits (€21,854 for small institutions with fewer than four programmes).

FAQ

Does an institutional audit impact the assessment procedure for distinctive features?

Whether or not an institution holds a positive institutional audit decision is irrelevant to the assessment of a distinctive feature. The panel observes the criteria and guidelines applicable to the specific distinctive feature for which the programme intends to apply.

What is the time frame for accreditation?

The maximum time frame for accreditation following an institutional audit is six years. NVAO may decide to grant a “conditionally positive” decision for a maximum term of two years.

How does the panel assess the institution?

The panel assessment is based on the institution’s own views and choices, and thus does justice to the autonomy of the institution. In its assessment, the panel verifies whether such views and choices command sufficient support among staff and students, and in the social sphere. Subsequently, it verifies whether the views have been translated into an appropriate educational policy, which is pursued in an effective manner and whose results are systematically monitored. It must be transparent to the panel how the institution’s reflection on its evaluation results and its pursuit of developments in the societal context are resulting in improvements, adjustments and development. The institution must provide transparent information to students, employers, and other societal actors with respect to the quality of its programmes.

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