

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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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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PREPARATION OF SECOND SITE VISIT

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7

THE NVAO PROCESS COORDINATOR PREPARES THE SECOND SITE VISIT –

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

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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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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...

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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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PROGRAMME ACCREDITATIONS

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RATES

For 2021, the NVAO rate for institutional audits (of recognised institutions) is EUR 38,500. For small (recognised) institutions providing fewer than four programmes, the rate is EUR 19,200.

Different rates apply for non-standard procedures. The costs of visits abroad, work performed by external experts, advisory work, or work associated with additional requirements will be invoiced additionally. Residual rates apply if applications for a new

institutional audit are withdrawn.

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.

How is the assessment of the Quality Agreements incorporated into an institutional audit procedure?

The assessment of the plans set down by government-funded universities within the context of the quality agreements may be incorporated into the institutional audit procedure as one of the “trails”. This obviates the need for a separate cycle. In such cases, the institutional audit panel also assesses the plan from the perspective of the quality agreements.

How does the institutional audit procedure differ from the first-round institutional audits?

The main changes are:

- The standards for institutional audits have been formulated in a more active manner, which remains closer to the educational practice: rather than an emphasis on monitoring and supervising the quality of education, the focus is now on keeping the educational philosophy up-to-date and appropriate, on realising the educational philosophy, and on sustainable quality development. For example, standard 3: from a management information system generating aggregated information to the organisation of effective feedback featuring reflection and participation across all the tiers of the institution;
- The separate standard relating to organisational structure has been incorporated into the other standards; as a result, one standard has been dropped;
- The past performance of institutions that have passed an institutional audit is taken into consideration in assessments conducted in the purview of extension of the validity of the institutional audit;
- The involvement of relevant stakeholders (staff, students, professional field) has now been explicitly formulated in all the standards.

The following has been added:

- Explicit referral to the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG), and attention on student-centred learning;
- Assessment rule of conditionally positive conclusion upon a maximum of two scores of “partially meets the standard”;
- Assessment rule of negative conclusion upon three or more scores of “partially meets the standard”;
- The possibility of scheduling the exploratory and in-depth visits consecutively for institutions holding a positive institutional audit decision, or when the audit is conducted by an international panel. In this respect, NVAO underlines that two separate visits would be preferable to the latter option;
- One audit trail has been specified in more detail: in-depth study into the effectiveness of the institution’s quality assurance system and the risk management of its programmes.

The following has been dropped:

- The pre-conditions for exploratory visits are no longer specified.

What is the timeframe for accreditation?

The maximum timeframe 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. NVAO will process the institutional audit within six months after receipt of the self-evaluation report. Upon receipt of the draft NVAO decision, the institution may lodge an appeal (see under “Appeals”).

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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