Recognition of new higher education institution (legal entity providing higher education)

Organisations wishing to provide recognised education need to be recognised as a legal entity providing higher education. A legal entity providing higher education is a legal body with full legal rights, which has been authorised by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science to confer recognised degrees. Such degrees are conferred on the basis of programmes that have been accredited by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and that are provided in accordance with the regulations set down in the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW).*

GENERAL INFO

Organisations wishing to apply for recognition must complete two successive procedures. It is recommended, prior to embarking on the procedures, to contact NVAO and possibly the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands for an introductory consultation.

1. Your organisation is a legal body with full legal capacity and is already providing education. Your organisation is already offering a full programme curriculum. As a legal body, your organisation demonstrably bears final responsibility for the full provision of the programme. The entire programme must have been provided in the Netherlands at least once recently and must have produced graduates (full cycle requirement). Final projects must be available for all potential modes of study and specialisations.**
2. On the basis of this programme*** you must submit an application for an *aggravated initial accreditation procedure* to NVAO. This procedure enables NVAO to assess the quality of the programme and to verify whether your organisation has achieved the intended learning outcomes. The procedure is outlined in the NVAO Assessment Framework. Upon a positive conclusion, the new programme will be accredited, subject to the condition that your organisation will eventually be recognised as a legal entity providing higher education. NVAO observes a procedural timeframe (for initial accreditations) of six months.

3. Subsequently, you must submit an application to the Education Executive Agency of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science – *Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs* (DUO) - to be granted the authority to confer degrees. Several documents must be provided with your application, including a positive NVAO decision following the aggravated initial accreditation procedure.**** Article 4 of the *Beleidsregel bevoegdheid graadverlening hoger onderwijs* [Policy Rule on the Authority to Confer Higher Education Degrees] sets out the documents concerned.
4. Based on your application, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education will formulate a recommendation to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. To this end, the Inspectorate will verify whether the financial and administrative continuity of the education to be provided is sufficiently safeguarded and whether the applicant's compliance with statutory rules and regulations is sufficiently safeguarded.
5. The DUO Agency will take a decision regarding your application on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Upon a positive decision, your organisation will be assigned a so-called BRIN number [BRIN = Basic Register of Institutions], whereupon you may have the accredited programme registered on the Dutch Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO). ***** The procedural timeframe for applications for the authority to confer degrees is sixteen weeks. The programme must be registered on the CROHO register within six months of a positive decision by NVAO.

6. Your organisation is now a recognised legal entity providing higher education. The associated rights and duties are set out in the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act. However, before your organisation becomes a recognised legal entity providing higher education, you must also comply with statutory provisions. For example, in the name of your organisation,

you cannot use the terms *universiteit* or *hogeschool* [university / university of applied sciences] or equivalents thereof in another language. Neither can you state that you are providing a Bachelor's or Master's programme or are conferring the associated degrees, before you have obtained the pertinent authority.

7. The *Beleidsregel bevoegdheid graadverlening hoger onderwijs* [Policy Rule on the Authority to Confer Higher Education Degrees] sets out, inter alia, the cases in which the Minister can rescind this authority. As a recognised legal entity providing higher education, you may launch more accredited programmes. Each subsequent new programme requires initial accreditation by NVAO. Such programmes will not need to undergo an aggravated procedure, which means that the full cycle requirement does not apply.

Notes

*A recognised legal entity providing higher education does not qualify for funding by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Government funding is reserved for research universities and universities of applied sciences listed in the Schedule to the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act. There is no procedure for inclusion in this Schedule, other than amendment of the Act.

**It is not possible to resort to facilities that have been provided under the responsibility of another recognised legal entity or to use final projects that have been established under the responsibility of another recognised legal entity.

***This can be either a Bachelor's or a Master's programme. Recognition on the basis of an Associate Degree programme is excluded, as is recognition on the basis of providing a joint programme or a joint specialisation as referred to in Article 7.3c of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act.

****In the event that your organisation is taking over an accredited programme from a higher education institution, there will be no need for an aggravated initial accreditation procedure. In such cases, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science can request NVAO to assess whether, following the take-over, the accredited programme will still be provided as such.

*****In the event that the Minister of Education, Culture and Science intends to reject your application because it is not warranted that your organisation will comply with the duty to foster a sense of social responsibility among its students, the Minister will first request advice on this issue from the *Commissie beoordeling uitingen maatschappelijk verantwoordelijkheidsbesef* [Committee for the Assessment of Expressions of Social Responsibility]. This involves exceptional situations in which there is a suspicion that relevant parties have engaged in discriminatory behaviour or statements. Assessment of such issues is not standard procedure; they are solely addressed on the basis of actual signals.

STEPS

RATES

In 2026, the rate charged by the NVAO for the enhanced assessment of a new programme within the framework of the procedure for recognition as a legal entity providing higher education amounts to €36,809.

Different rates apply to other or alternative procedures. Costs related to international site visits or the deployment of external experts, advisory services, or additional requirements are invoiced separately. If an application for the enhanced assessment of a new programme is withdrawn, a residual rate applies in 2026, as follows:

- €4,000 – prior to the start of the panel activities (also applicable if the application is withdrawn or declared inadmissible);

- €14,000 – prior to the site visit;
- €36,809 – after the site visit.

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