ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION SYSTEM OF THE NETHERLANDS

SEPTEMBER 2018

NVAO

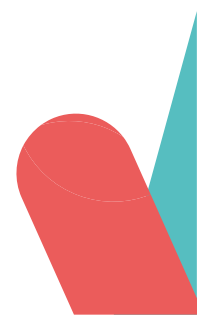# ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION SYSTEM OF THE NETHERLANDS

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Disclaimer: this document contains the English translation of the Dutch text of the *Beoordelingskader accreditatiestelsel hoger onderwijs Nederland* as published in the Staatscourant 2019, no. 3198. This translation is provided by NVAO to facilitate assessment procedures in English. It has no formal status. In all cases the Dutch text is legally binding.

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Introduction

The *Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands* that came into force in September 2016 marked an important step towards the assessment of the quality of higher education programmes and institutions in the Netherlands based on trust in the existing high quality of Dutch higher education. With the adoption of the "Wet accreditatie op maat" (Dutch Accreditation Act 2018), this principle has been explicitly anchored in legislation. In order to align the accreditation framework with the new act, a limited number of adjustments have been made to the September 2016 framework. The standards to be met by programmes and institutions have remained virtually unchanged.

Even more so than the previous one, this new framework aims to endorse staff and student ownership of the programmes and to reduce the administrative burden of the accreditation process for programmes and institutions. At the same time, the system must be sufficiently robust to safeguard the quality of programmes and institutions, be able to enforce improvement, and render the quality offered visible to students, employers, and society.

The first round of institutional audits has made a significant contribution to the establishment of quality assurance systems at the institutional level and a quality culture in the field of education. The second round will be focused on assessing the robustness of the aforementioned quality assurance system and the associated procedures, and whether a sustained quality culture has been established within the institutions. In that case, a positive judgement on all the standards will confirm trust in the institution.
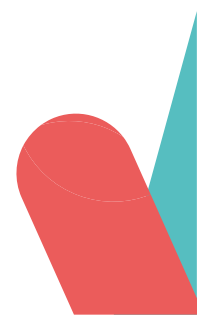The second round of institutional audits thus constitutes a key building block for a system based on trust. The institutional audit framework has been reviewed from this perspective and now offers room for the further development of a system in which trust is the point of departure.

Its open structure and elaboration enhance the flexibility of the quality assurance system and reduce the associated administrative burden. The framework takes both trust and self-confidence as its points of departure. Existing documents will suffice to demonstrate the quality, expertise and knowledge of those who substantiate the education provided. This means that institutions and programmes will not be required to provide more than is outlined in this framework.

Further simplification has been achieved by opting for binary, undifferentiated conclusions. The panels will assess a programme as either (conditionally) positive or negative. NVAO will then decide whether or not to accredit a programme. The assessment reports outline the strengths and points for improvement of the programmes; however, NVAO will not take these into consideration in its accreditation decision.

In the same vein lies the introduction of accreditation for an indefinite period of time for existing programmes. Every six years, NVAO determines, on the basis of an assessment report, whether a programme will retain its accreditation. In the event of shortcomings that can be remedied within two years, NVAO will award conditional accreditation.

In line with the societal debate on the added value of providing English language teaching in higher education programmes, a specific provision has been included in the programme assessment framework to safeguard the quality of programmes being taught in a language other than Dutch. This provision stipulates that the programme must justify its choice of language and that its teachers must be capable of teaching in such language. This also applies to programmes that bear a foreign language name.

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The framework has been structured in a manner that clearly shows institutions what is expected of them. To this end, Chapter 2 includes an overview of the procedures and accreditation decisions currently in place, and explains the set-up and working methods of assessments. Chapters 3 and 4 set out the frameworks for the assessment of new programmes and existing programmes respectively, along with the associated assessment rules. Each of these chapters contains all the relevant information concerning such assessments, and warrants reading as an independent component.

The assessment framework ties in with the criteria set down in the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines - ESG). It sketches the criteria underpinning the quality assurance system of the Dutch higher education sector.

The framework continues to observe the peer review system as the best method to verify quality. The assessments are carried out on the basis of an approach and mindset that befit evaluation by peers. The panel of independent and authoritative experts enters into an open dialogue with the institution regarding quality. The self-evaluation report informs the panel of the reflective cycle in place at the institution to safeguard and continually improve its quality: from philosophy, aims and objectives to implementation, from evaluation and results to improvement and development.
The framework expressly calls for attention to be paid to quality culture and its embedding, always in interconnection with quality assurance tools.

The framework is based on respect for the autonomy of the institutions that bear primary responsibility for their quality. The philosophy, aims and objectives of the institution or programme constitute the starting point for the assessment and will not be assessed in terms of content. The point of departure is that students and staff substantiate the education provided and the programme, sharing an important responsibility to this end as "owners". However, society as a whole is also an owner and stakeholder of education: good and accessible higher education is essential for a sustained and well-balanced development of present-day society, from both an economic and a societal perspective.

The assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands has been established following consultations with the umbrella organisations for publicly funded and private universities, universities of applied sciences, quality assessment agencies, student organisations, employers' organisations, with input from many parties involved in educational practice.

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1 Institutional audits

1.1 Introduction

An institutional audit is a periodic, external, and independent assessment of the 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 determine whether the institution's internal quality assurance system, in interconnection with its quality culture, safeguards the realisation of its individual vision of good education.

In this framework, the term "institutional audit" (instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg) refers to an assessment that results in a positive institutional audit decision (erkenning ITK) in accordance with the "Wet accreditatie op maat" (Dutch Accreditation Act 2018). For the sake of clarity, any reference in this framework to an institutional audit decision based on a previous framework and earlier legislation is also termed a "positive institutional audit decision".

A quality assurance system comprises simple, univocal, and verifiable aims and objectives, procedures to safeguard quality, embedding of the Plan Do Check Act (PDCA) cycle in the organisation, "*hard controls*", periodic evaluations, and systematic monitoring of improvements. Quality culture refers to a distinct and manifested vision, a shared focus on improvements, leadership, accountability, and "*soft controls*", cooperation and self-management, (academic) professionalism, student commitment, and an external orientation. Both dimensions of focusing on and pursuing a good quality of education are considered in the institutional audit. The institution demonstrates the effectiveness of its own synergy between the two dimensions, which allows it room to choose its own balance. In this framework, the term "quality assurance" expressly refers to both dimensions: the quality assurance system and the quality culture.

The key question is: is the institution safeguarding the realisation of its vision of good education, and is the institution continuously working on development and improvement?

This key question is answered on the basis of **four coherent questions** that constitute the point of departure for the institutional audit:
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?

In this framework, the above questions have been translated into **four standards**:
1. Vision and policy
2. Implementation
3. Evaluation and monitoring
4. Focus on development

The four standards constitute a "reflective cycle" on the basis of which the institution demonstrates that all its departments observe a strong quality culture focused on development, and follow up policy results. The quality culture is supported by an efficient internal quality assurance system that continually safeguards the quality of the education it provides.

With the institutional audit, the institution gives account to society regarding the soundness of its assurance of the quality of the education it provides, and demonstrates its safeguarding of sustained quality development.

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The point of departure for the institutional audit is the institution's well-defined, shared, and propagated vision of good education. The vision itself is not assessed in terms of content during the audit. The institution is autonomous and develops an individual vision of good education that must be properly geared to the expectations and requirements of the professional field, peers, students, and society. The institution and its staff and students support and develop this vision based on an external orientation and in consultation with civic society.

The open nature of the framework underscores the autonomy of the institution and its own responsibility for the quality it provides. The open nature contributes to the ownership of its teachers and students. By reference to the open standards, the panel reflects on the institution's vision of good education in the meetings, the manner in which it is substantiated, the evaluation, and the results. The use of open standards offers scope for diversity in the implementation and set-up of an institution's educational policy, including between different sections of the institution if so desired.

Sustained and systematic embedding of internal quality assurance in previous years is taken into consideration in the assessment of applications for extension of the validity of positive institutional audit decisions.

The institutional audit is conducted by an external panel of independent experts (peer review). The panel members are appointed by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). The panel ascertains whether the institution has an adequate quality assurance system in place to safeguard the quality of its programmes and a quality culture that encourages all those involved to strive for (continued) quality development.

1.2   Standards

Philosophy and policy
Standard 1: The institution has a broadly supported educational philosophy and pursues a corresponding policy focused on the internal quality assurance of its education.
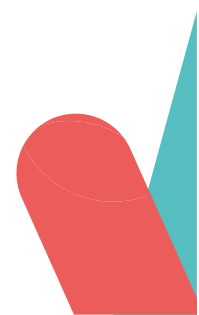
The institution holds a well-defined view of good education which is shared in all its departments. Teachers and students support this philosophy, and develop it in mutual consultation and in concert with external stakeholders. Periodic coordination with the relevant (changing) environment ensures the topicality of this philosophy. The educational philosophy has been translated into explicit points of departure for quality assurance. In accordance with the ESG, the educational philosophy is student-oriented (student-centred learning).

Implementation
Standard 2: The institution realises its educational philosophy in an effective manner, which is demonstrated by appropriate policy actions and processes, particularly relating to staff, student assessment, services and facilities, and students with a functional impairment.

The philosophy has been appropriately translated into concrete policy actions and processes. The institution has processes in place for the design, recognition, and quality assurance of its programmes in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines, and demonstrates the effectiveness and application of such processes by means of a track record. Students and staff co-own the policy and contribute to its realisation on the basis of the shared philosophy. This commitment demonstrates how the institution realises its intended quality culture.

Implementation is consistent with the philosophy: staff, student assessment, and services and facilities further the accessibility and practicability of the education provided.

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<u>Evaluation and monitoring</u>
Standard 3: The institution systematically evaluates whether the intended policy objectives relating to educational quality are achieved. Relevant stakeholders are involved in this process.

The institution organises effective feedback that supports the realisation of its policy. To that end, it initiates appropriate evaluation and measurement activities that are stably embedded in the institution. These tools provide insightful information that can be used for the formulation of desired quality development. The tools comprise a transparent method for identifying and reporting risks, taking action where needed, with a focus on improvement. Reflection on the output forms part of the organisational model, and provides sufficient insight into the effectiveness of the policy implementation in all tiers of the organisation and staff participation.

Since the measurement and evaluation activities revolve around effectiveness, they do not need to be uniform across the entire institution. Students, staff, alumni and experts from the professional field are actively involved in the evaluations. The institution publishes accurate, up-to-date and accessible information regarding the evaluation results.

<u>Development</u>
Standard 4: The institution has a focus on development and works systematically on the improvement of its education.

Feedback and reflection on output constitute the basis for measures targeted at reinforcing, improving, or adjusting policy or its implementation. Following up on measures for improvement is embedded in the organisational structure. The development policy pursued by the institution encourages all the parties concerned to contribute to innovation and quality improvement. Internal and external stakeholders have been informed regarding the developments that are primed on the basis of the evaluation outcomes. The institution pursues continuous improvement, adapts to the (changing) circumstances, and conforms to the expectations of students and employers.

<u>Final conclusion</u> (weighted and substantiated)

1.3   Institutional audits: panel judgements and assessment rules

Judgement per standard		
The panel scores each standard:		
	Meets the standard:	The institution meets the standard;
	Partially meets the standard:	The institution meets the standard to a significant extent, but improvements are needed in order to fully meet the standard (see *Additional assessment rules regarding conditions*).
	Does not meet the standard:	The institution does not meet the standard.
Final conclusion		
In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the institution. In reaching such a conclusion, it observes the following assessment rules:		
	Positive:	The institution meets all the standards.
	Conditionally positive:	A judgement of "partially meets the standard" for a maximum of two standards, whereby the panel recommends conditions to be imposed (see *Additional assessment rules regarding conditions*).
	Negative:	The institution fails to meet one or more standards and additionally "partially meets" three or more other standards.
Additional assessment rules regarding conditions		

	A score of "partially meets the standard" means that an institution meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed. When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the institution to have realised improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative". NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative".
Recommendations	
	With respect to each standard, the panel may suggest improvements, which will be stated separately from the substantiation of its judgements in its report.

1.4 Assessment process

1.4.1 Submission of applications

The institution must submit an application to NVAO by means of a letter or email. When the institution wishes to extend the validity of an existing positive institutional audit decision (re-application), such an application must be submitted at least one year prior to expiry of the positive institutional audit decision.
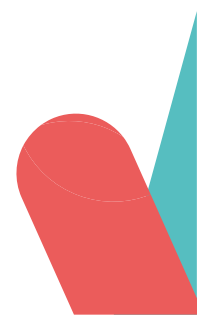
1.4.2 Board consultations

Upon receipt of the application, NVAO initiates consultations with the Board of the institution. The Board consultations involve an introduction to and explanation of the institutional audit. Examples of the topics that could be discussed during the consultations are: the institution's organisational structure and profile, the (international) composition of the panel and the language to be used in conducting the audit, the time frame, the format and scope of the self-evaluation, points for attention with respect to the assessment, wishes with respect to the organisation of the site visits, and the material available in the institution for the purpose of the audit.

Prior to the Board consultations, the accreditation portrait is forwarded to the institution. This accreditation portrait presents an overview of the results of the accreditations and initial accreditations carried out in recent years. The institution is given the opportunity to submit corrections. NVAO takes account of the diversity in organisational forms and of the institution's specific nature. Representatives of students and staff from the participatory bodies or (student) involvement bodies applicable to the institution will be involved in the Board consultations.

1.4.3 Panel composition

Following the Board consultations, NVAO appoints the panel that will conduct the institutional audit. Subsequently, the institution to be audited has a period of two weeks to inform NVAO of any substantiated objections to the composition of the panel.

The experts conducting institutional audits are independent of the institution. This means that:

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- for at least five years, they have had no direct or indirect ties with the institution to be audited that would lead to (the semblance of) a conflict of interest;
- for at least five years, they have not performed any consultancy work for the benefit of the institution, whose results could be an object of the assessment.

They are authoritative at the administrative level or within the development of higher education, they command auditing expertise, or they represent the professional field. Prior to the assessment, the panel members sign a declaration of independence.

The panel members jointly command the following expertise:
- administrative expertise;
- higher education expertise, preferably including with respect to developments beyond the Netherlands;
- expertise regarding the structure and effectiveness of quality assurance systems;
- recent experience in the (international) social sphere or the professional field in which the institution is operating;
- recent experience as a higher education student.

The panel is composed of a maximum of five members, at least one of whom is a student member. The institution is consulted with respect to the composition of the panel. The panel is supported by a secretary who commands the expertise set out in Paragraph 2.3 (Assessments) of this framework and by an NVAO process coordinator. The latter monitors the propriety of the assessment process and the formation of judgements, and serves as the contact person for the institution. The secretary meets the independency requirement as set out above for panel members. Prior to the assessment, the secretary will sign a declaration of independence.
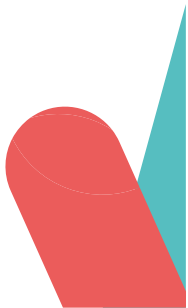
With a view to the expertise required, NVAO provides all panel members and the secretary with a training course specifically aimed at institutional audits.

The panel conducts a peer review, i.e., consultation among peers occupies centre stage. The panel's attitude and approach correspond to this point of departure. This means, for example, that the panel operates on the basis of trust and respects the principles of the institution, conducts an open dialogue with the institution, does justice to the various perspectives of quality, and contributes to improvement.

1.4.4   Self-evaluation and other documents

The institution draws up a self-evaluation, outlining its strengths and weaknesses. The self-evaluation report is submitted to the representative council or participatory body/bodies appropriate to the institution for advice. The self-evaluation report is a self-contained document comprising a maximum of 50 pages (excluding appendices). The advice by the representative council forms part of the self-evaluation report. The institution may contact NVAO to agree on another format or scope for the self-evaluation report (see *Board Consultations* above).

The institution selects other documents that will be made available for perusal by the panel prior to the site visit. The contents and format of such documents are not subject to any prior requirements. The panel may request additional information but will exercise restraint in this respect. The point of departure is that the institution provides the documents and information that the panel requires in order to carry out its duties. Existing material is used wherever possible. In principle, NVAO leaves it up to the institution and the panel to decide in mutual consultation which information is required to form a proper judgement. If need be, NVAO may give a binding decision.

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The institution must forward its self-evaluation report with appendices to NVAO no later than six weeks prior to the panel's first site visit.

1.4.5 Site visits

In principle, the panel conducts two site visits: an exploratory visit and an in-depth visit. The first and the second visit are at least four weeks apart. During the first visit, the panel forms a general picture of the institution. During the second visit, at least two audit trails are conducted to gain more in-depth insight.

One trail involves an in-depth study into the effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance and the risk management of programmes. The panel selects a few programmes, based on which it investigates the structure of the quality assurance system, risk identification, and the monitoring of the results across all the tiers of the organisation. In addition, the panel defines the theme issues for the in-depth audit trail(s) at the end of the preparatory visit. In the event of a re-application, the findings of the previous visit are taken into consideration to this end.

In the event of a re-application for an institutional audit and, if so requested by the institution, NVAO may decide to have the first and second visit take place consecutively, for example, if the audit is conducted by an international panel.
When the visits will take place consecutively, NVAO informs the institution four weeks prior to the visit of the topics to be considered in the audit trail(s). In such cases, time will be allocated in the schedule for the discussion of topics or issues that are found during the visit to require a more in-depth examination.

During the Board consultations, institutions are free to submit any requests regarding the organisation of the site visits.

Panel preparation

Prior to the first exploratory visit, the panel will have perused the institution's self-evaluation report and accreditation portrait.
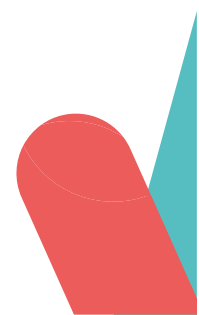In a preparatory internal consultation, the panel discusses the self-evaluation and the underlying documents. In addition, the panel formulates the questions it intends to pose to the discussion partners during the first visit, and sets down its approach.

First visit: exploration

During the exploratory visit, the panel becomes acquainted with the institution. During this visit, the panel meets with various bodies, including the supervisory board, the board of the institution, managers qualified to teach, staff responsible for quality assurance and other relevant staff members, teachers from representative bodies, students from representative bodies, and representatives from the social sphere.

In addition, time is set aside for open consultations. The open consultations offer all the staff members, students and other stakeholders of the institution the opportunity to present, in confidence, their own views on the quality assurance in place in the institution. Prior to the visit, the institution will make these open consultations widely known. Anyone who wishes to avail him/herself of this opportunity may apply to the panel secretary by email.

The process coordinator contacts the institution to discuss the organisation of the site visit and the announcement of the open consultations. At the end of the first visit, the panel chair

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provides brief feedback to the institution. This feedback reflects the panel's first impressions and indicates the audit trails to be conducted.

Second visit: in-depth study

During the in-depth visit to the institution, the audit trails are conducted. An audit trail enables the panel to ascertain whether its first impressions were correct. The topics to be considered during the audit trails are specified under *Site visits*. Audit trails may adopt either a horizontal or a vertical approach to the organisation. "Horizontal" trails examine the implementation or monitoring of a specific aim or objective or aspect in a specific tier of the organisation, e.g., all the faculties. "Vertical" trails follow the implementation in "the line" across all the organisational layers. The trail focusing on how programmes monitor quality assurance is "vertical" in nature.

Within the panel, judgements are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. Equal justice is done to the various perspectives of quality represented on the panel, including the student perspective. In this respect, the panel strives for consensus.

At the end of the in-depth visit, the panel chair provides brief feedback regarding the panel's preliminary findings. The final findings are included in the advisory report.

1.4.6   Advisory report

The panel secretary draws up an advisory report comprising a maximum of 30 pages.
This report contains a summary of the panel's findings and considerations underpinning the judgements. The essence of the report comprises, with respect to each standard: the substantiated findings of the panel, the considerations, the judgement, recommendations, and conditions, if any. The panel bases its substantiation on the self-evaluation report, the meetings with representatives of the institution, and findings based on the material examined.
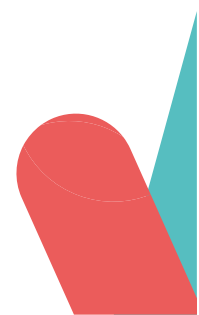
The report opens with a brief, concise summary aimed at a wider reading public. The report closes with a score table reflecting the judgements on each standard and a well-reasoned final conclusion.
The appendix comprises the composition of the panel and brief CV descriptions of the panel members, the approach adopted by the panel, the dates and schedules of the site visits (including names and positions of the discussion partners, save the names of the participants in the open consultations), and a list of the material examined.

The panel chair will endorse the draft report after the panel members have approved its contents. The institution receives this draft report in order to correct any factual inaccuracies. The institution will have a period of two weeks to do so. The panel will incorporate the response provided by the institution and subsequently the panel chair will endorse the final report, after all the panel members have approved it. The panel chair will then submit the report to NVAO. Thereupon, NVAO will launch a process for its administrative review of the advisory report.

1.5   Decision-making by NVAO

NVAO forms an opinion about the advisory report, thereby considering consistency, panel approach, procedural requirements, substantiation and weighting in order to ascertain that the panel recommendations have been substantiated in a thorough, proper, and verifiable manner, and that the panel has reached its judgements in a consistent manner. NVAO may invite the panel chair (and possibly other panel members) to provide an explanation. NVAO informs the institution about these consultations and may invite the institution to attend. Institutions may also express to NVAO their need for an explanation.

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Based on the panel advisory report and the explanation, if any, NVAO forms a substantiated and independent opinion. The decision regarding a positive institutional audit may be: positive; conditionally positive, or negative. The institution is given the opportunity to respond to factual inaccuracies in the intended decision.

A conditionally positive institutional audit decision involves NVAO setting down one or more conditions. NVAO specifies the time frame within which the institution must provide the information required to assess whether the conditions have been met, so that re-assessment can take place after a maximum of two years.

A negative decision entails that the institution has failed the institutional audit.

Institutions that have (conditionally) passed the institutional audit may avail themselves of the frameworks for limited programme assessment (existing and new programmes) for the term of its validity.

Publication

Within six months of the application, NVAO will take a decision regarding the result of the institutional audit. It will publish its decision regarding the result of the institutional audit and the advisory report on its website.

Withdrawal of applications

The institution is free to withdraw its application during the entire assessment procedure, up to such time as NVAO has taken a final decision – in the manner set out in the "Algemene wet bestuursrecht" (Dutch General Administrative Law Act) – and has published such decision.

Under the European Standards and Guidelines, NVAO is obliged to publish all assessment reports, including those involving a negative conclusion. The administrative review will commence upon the submission of the advisory report to NVAO by the panel chair. In all cases, this will lead to the publication of the advisory report. If the institution chooses to withdraw its application before the panel chair has submitted the advisory report to NVAO, NVAO will not publish the advisory report.

1.6   Assessment of the conditions

In a conditionally positive institutional audit decision, NVAO sets out the conditions to be met and the time frame within which they have to be met. This results in the following steps:
- Before this time frame expires, the institution must submit documents to NVAO demonstrating its satisfaction of the conditions.
- In principle, NVAO will request the panel that has conducted the earlier assessment to assess whether the conditions have been met. NVAO may decide to change the composition of the panel. The panel decides on the approach to be adopted for the assessment of the conditions.
- The organisation of the assessment is coordinated between the panel, the institution, and NVAO.
- The panel submits an advisory report to NVAO.
- In the event that the conditions have not been met within the time frame stipulated, the conditionally positive institutional audit decision will be withdrawn.

NVAO will take a decision within a reasonable period of time.

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1.7   Evaluation

Following the completion of the institutional audit process, NVAO will contact the institution and the panel members to evaluate the procedure.

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2 Accreditation

2.1 Introduction

The programme accreditation system covers Associate Degree, Bachelor's, and (postgraduate) Master's programmes in the professional higher education and academic education sectors in the Netherlands. This chapter outlines the accreditation of programmes as set out in the Dutch Customised Accreditation Act and the associated assessments: the initial accreditation and external assessment procedures. It also explains the procedural steps that institutions and programmes must follow in order to acquire and retain their accreditation.

2.2 Programme situations

The accreditation system distinguishes two forms of accreditation regarding higher education programmes: the "initial accreditation" (accreditatie nieuwe opleiding) of new programmes whose validity is limited to a maximum of six years and the "accreditation of an existing programme" (accreditatie bestaande opleiding) which is valid for an indefinite period of time. NVAO may set conditions with respect to both forms of accreditation.

The point of departure is that all programmes are assessed by an NVAO approved panel of independent experts every six years. Such assessment takes place from a comparative perspective with similar programmes. To this end, all the programmes covered by the accreditation system have been divided into assessment clusters. NVAO sets down the deadline by which these clusters must submit a complete and formally correct assessment report to NVAO in order to acquire or retain accreditation. The period between two submission deadlines is, in principle, six years; however, exceptions may be made if the division into assessment clusters so requires. The submission deadline is strictly observed. Not keeping the deadline will prompt NVAO to withdraw accreditation.

Obligation to provide information

When applying for accreditation or initial accreditation (and in the report submitted to retain accreditation), institutions are required to list all the specialisations, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the programme in question. Courses of study that have not been reported are not covered by the accreditation.

The situations that are relevant to new and existing programmes are briefly outlined below, along with the associated procedures.

Accreditation of new programmes

An institution wishing to launch a new programme may apply to NVAO for "initial accreditation assessment" (toets nieuwe opleiding). This involves the assessment of a reasonably detailed plan for the programme by a panel of independent experts. This plan must contain sufficient information to enable a panel of peers to assess whether the programme, as a minimum, meets the generic quality standard. Based on its role as the "gatekeeper" of the accredited higher education system, NVAO convenes and appoints the panels responsible for the initial accreditation assessments. NVAO also coordinates the assessments.

Upon a positive outcome of the initial accreditation assessment, the new programme is granted "initial accreditation", whose validity is limited to a maximum of six years. At the proposal of the institution, NVAO assigns the programme to an assessment cluster and sets the date by which a report on the proximate assessment must be submitted: the "submission deadline". This date is stated in the accreditation decision. With this decision, the institution reports the programme to

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the Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO) to be registered on the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO). Upon a negative outcome of the initial accreditation assessment, NVAO will refuse accreditation of the new programme.

NVAO may set conditions regarding the accreditation of a new programme if the assessment reveals that the programme still has minor shortcomings that can be remedied within a short period of time. This will lead to the following steps:

- NVAO sets down a maximum time frame of two years within which the programme must satisfy the conditions (the "conditions satisfaction deadline");
- Before this time frame expires, the institution must, in principle, have the panel that has conducted the initial accreditation assessment verify whether the programme has satisfied the conditions and submit a report to this effect to NVAO. At the time of re-assessment, the panel must still meet the independency requirement;
- Only in the event of changes to the composition of the panel is NVAO approval required in order to determine whether the intended panel, as a whole, still commands the required expertise;
- Within a reasonable period of time NVAO will take a decision based on the report submitted.

Upon a positive outcome, the programme will keep its initial accreditation. Upon a negative outcome, NVAO will withdraw its initial accreditation.

New programmes provided by institutions that do not hold a positive institutional audit decision (erkenning ITK) and whose achieved learning outcomes have not been assessed in the initial accreditation assessment procedure must have the student assessment procedures and the learning outcomes achieved by then assessed within three years after obtaining initial accreditation. This assessment must be carried out by the panel that has conducted the initial accreditation assessment.
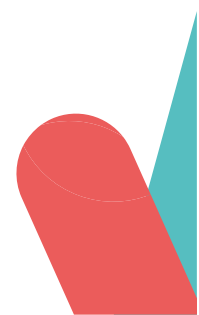
Accreditation of existing programmes

A new programme that has obtained initial accreditation must have its quality assessed by a panel of independent experts within the context of the assessment cluster. By no later than the submission deadline, the institution must apply to NVAO for accreditation of an existing programme. Following a positive external assessment, the programme will be granted accreditation of an existing programme. With this decision, the institution informs DUO that accreditation has been granted in order for the programme to be registered on the CROHO register. Upon a negative outcome of the assessment, NVAO will refuse accreditation.

Retention of accreditation of existing programmes

The accreditation of an existing programme is valid for an indefinite period of time and does not expire. In the purview of retaining such accreditation, the programme must undergo an assessment within the context of the assessment cluster and submit the assessment report to NVAO before the submission deadline. It does not need to apply for retention of its accreditation. Upon a positive outcome of the assessment procedure, NVAO will decide to keep up the accreditation, inform DUO with a view to CROHO registration, and set a new submission deadline for the programme. This does not require any further action on the part of the institution. In the event of a negative assessment in which improvement within the foreseeable future is not deemed feasible, NVAO will withdraw the accreditation.

NVAO may impose conditions with respect to both the acquisition and the retention of the accreditation of an existing programme. The methodology is similar to the procedure outlined above regarding the initial accreditation of new programmes.

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- With the assessment report, the programme submits a plan for improvement along with recommendations by the programme committee or, if such is not statutorily dictated, by the panel;
- The programme will be granted conditional accreditation of an existing programme and NVAO will set a "conditions satisfaction deadline";
- The programme must, in principle, have the realisation of the conditions verified by the same panel that has conducted the earlier assessment. At the time of the reassessment, the panel must still meet the independency requirement;
- Only in the event of changes to the composition of the panel is NVAO approval required in order to determine whether the intended panel, as a whole, still commands the required expertise;
- Before the end of the conditions time frame (conditions satisfaction deadline), the programme must submit the report on the assessment to NVAO.

The programme will keep its accreditation of an existing programme if it is found that the programme has satisfied the conditions within the time frame stipulated. NVAO will withdraw its accreditation if the programme has manifestly failed to satisfy such conditions.
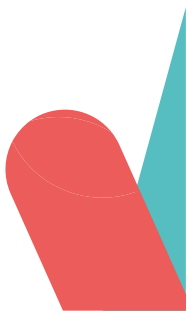
2.3 Assessments

The accreditation framework sets out the quality criteria to be met by accredited programmes. It distinguishes between the ex-ante assessment of new programmes in the initial accreditation assessment and the assessment of achieved results in the external assessment procedures that are scheduled every six years. In addition, the framework makes a distinction between limited and extensive assessments. All assessments are aimed at both improvement and accountability.

Programmes offered by institutions that have passed an institutional audit may be assessed in accordance with the limited framework. When the limited framework is used, the panel is requested to avoid any overlap with the institutional audit. The limited framework is focused on the substantive quality of the programme, including the required learning environment and the teaching staff. Topics that are left out of consideration are: institution-wide quality assurance and quality culture aspects, the student assessment policy pursued by the institution, its staff policy, its services and facilities, and alignment with the institution's educational philosophy. After all, these aspects have already been assessed during the institutional audit. The extensive framework, on the other hand, also considers the embedding of the programme in the institution's policy, the services and facilities, quality assurance and quality culture.

Panels

All the assessments set out in the framework are conducted by an NVAO approved panel of independent and expert peers, among whom at least one student. The framework specifies the requirements to be met by the panel in terms of expertise, competencies, experience, and independence. Furthermore, the framework sets out the requirements regarding the expertise and independence of the panel secretary. At least three months before the site visit associated with an external assessment, the institutions involved in the assessment cluster must submit a collective, documented application to NVAO for approval of the panel and the secretary. NVAO draws up guidelines for the manner in which institutions may substantiate the expertise and independence of panel members and the panel secretary in the application for approval of the composition of a panel.

The panel assesses programmes on the basis of the standards contained in the limited or extensive framework, observing the assessment rules included in the framework. All panel members have an equal vote and equal input in the panel. The panel chair is responsible for

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leading the discussions during the site visit and the panel consultations. In addition, the panel chair ensures a balanced formation of judgements.

In institutional audit and initial accreditation assessment, an NVAO process coordinator supports the panel, monitors the propriety of the assessment process and the formation of judgements in accordance with the framework, and serves as a liaison between the institution, NVAO, and the panel. A secretary who commands the expertise listed below (paragraph 2.3, Assessments) will draw up the reports. In external assessment procedures, the secretary, who must command the aforementioned expertise, may also act as a coordinator and monitor the propriety of the assessment process and the formation of judgements in accordance with the framework. The process coordinator and the secretary do not sit on the panel. NVAO will formulate a detailed description of the peer review process to ensure the formation of consistent and reliable judgements.

Panel members must meet the following requirements to ensure their independence:
- for at least five years, they have had no direct or indirect ties with the institution to be audited that could lead to (the semblance of) a conflict of interest;
- they are not employed by, nor do they have business interests in, the agency that is organising the assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not;
- for at least five years, they have not performed any consultancy work for the benefit of the programme to be assessed, or in another context within the institution, whose results could be an object of the assessment.
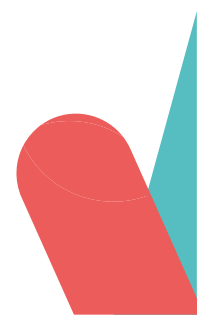
These requirements also apply to panel secretaries, with the exception that secretaries may be employed by an agency that is organising an assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not.

In addition, the panel secretary must command the following expertise:
- command thorough knowledge of the accreditation framework and of the rules and guidelines that apply to the assessment of higher education programmes;
- be capable of monitoring and supervising the assessment and judgement formation process in accordance with the framework, including:
  - the preliminary panel consultations;
  - calibration of the panel with respect to the interpretation of the standards, assessment rules, and judgements in the accreditation framework;
  - the assessment of achieved learning outcomes in accordance with the relevant guidelines set out in the framework;
- be capable of reporting on assessments in a manner that is formally correct and accessible to a wide reading public;
- the secretary will regularly need to demonstrate that he or she is competent and skilled at monitoring and supervising assessment processes, is well versed with the accreditation framework, and draws up high-quality reports.

NVAO or the agency or consultant coordinating an assessment is responsible for training the panel chair. Prior to the site visit, the process coordinator or secretary will brief the panel members extensively on the framework and the assessment procedure, and on the attitude expected of panel members during the interviews. Furthermore, the secretary or process coordinator ensures calibration of the panel by going over the interpretation of the standards, the judgements, and the assessment rules.

Institutions are not obliged to call in a quality assessment agency to coordinate an external assessment. The "Wet accreditatie op maat" (Dutch Accreditation Act 2018) emphasises institutions' and programmes' ownership of the quality assurance of the education they provide.

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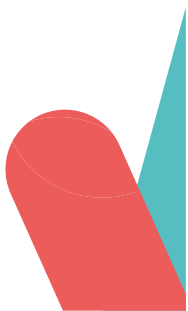NVAO • Netherlands • Confidence in quality

The framework offers institutions the express option of taking the periodic assessment of programmes in the purview of acquiring or retaining accreditation into their own hands. To this end, they are free to convene a panel and request a secretary who commands the expertise listed above (paragraph 2.3, Assessments) to coordinate and report on the assessment. The institution must verify that the secretary meets the independency requirements set out in the framework. The institution must submit the panel composition and the secretary to NVAO for approval.

2.4   NVAO decision-making

In all procedures involving decisions to be made, NVAO forms an independent opinion based on an advisory or assessment report by a panel and the associated explanatory notes, if any. NVAO forms an opinion on this report, reviewing its consistency, the approach adopted by the panel, procedural requirements, substantiation, and weighting in order to ascertain that the panel report has been substantiated in a thorough, proper, and verifiable manner, and that the panel has reached its judgements in a consistent manner. In all procedures, including in those for which NVAO has convened a panel, NVAO may invite the panel chair (and possibly other panel members) to provide a further explanation. NVAO informs the institution about such consultations and may invite the institution to attend. Institutions may express their need for an explanation or request to attend a panel meeting as an observer.

2.5   Evaluation

NVAO considers it its duty to continuously evaluate and improve the operation of the accreditation system. It fulfils this duty by evaluating the procedure together with the institution or programme involved and the panel members, upon completion of assessments it has coordinated. NVAO also evaluates the processing of accreditation applications together with the applying institutions. Upon completion of procedures in which NVAO has been involved, NVAO offers institutions the option of inviting NVAO for an evaluation meeting regarding the procedure. This meeting is aimed at the evaluation and improvement of the procedure; it is not intended to discuss the outcomes, or the judgements involved.

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3 Initial accreditation

3.1 Introduction

In this framework, the assessment of new programmes is referred to as "initial accreditation assessment"; it involves an ex-ante assessment. The assessment is intended to ensure that new programmes, as a minimum, meet the generic quality standards upon commencement. The NVAO role as a "gatekeeper" entails that NVAO convenes the panels conducting the initial accreditation assessments and coordinates the assessment procedures.

In most cases, the new programme will not yet have produced any outcomes to be assessed. That is why the initial accreditation assessment is focused on plans and pre-conditions; it only addresses the quality achieved if there is sufficient evidence in this regard. The plans must have been elaborated to a sufficient extent in order to give the panel a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes of the entire programme, the set-up of the curriculum, the learning environment, the student assessment, and the staff team that is going to teach the programme. With respect to the first 60 ECs of the programme, these aspects must have been elaborated in detail. Paragraph 3.4.1 provides further details regarding the information dossier to be compiled in initial accreditation procedures.

An initial accreditation assessment encompasses a site visit that, in principle, takes one day. During this visit, the panel meets with the development team and/or the intended teaching staff to discuss the substantiation of the curriculum and the achievement and assessment of the intended learning outcomes.

Obligation to provide information

When applying for initial accreditation, institutions are required to list all the specialisations, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the new programme in question. Courses of study that have not been reported are not covered by the accreditation.

Limited and extensive frameworks

Programmes provided by institutions that have passed an institutional audit will be assessed in accordance with the limited framework. When the limited framework is used, the panel is requested to avoid any overlap with the institutional audit. The limited framework is focused on the substantive quality of the programme, including the required learning environment and the teaching staff. Topics that are left out of consideration are: institution-wide quality assurance and quality culture aspects, the student assessment policy pursued by the institution, its staff policy, its services and facilities, and alignment with the institution's educational philosophy. After all, these aspects have already been assessed during the institutional audit. The extensive framework, on the other hand, also considers the embedding of the programme in the institution's policy, the services and facilities, quality assurance and quality culture.

3.2 Limited framework

Intended learning outcomes
Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or

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international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

Teaching-learning environment
Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name. The teaching staff must have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching. Services and facilities are not assessed, unless they have been set up specifically for the programme concerned.

Student assessment
Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

As a rule, standard 4 is not addressed in an initial accreditation assessment. The panel will only assess this standard if, in the opinion of NVAO, the procedure involves an existing programme and final projects are available to be assessed.
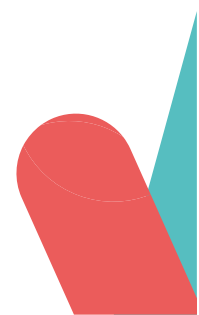
Achieved learning outcomes
Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in postgraduate programmes.

Note regarding the assessment of achieved learning outcomes

In the event of an initial accreditation assessment that also covers existing programme components, the panel will assess standard 4. To this end, the panel will examine a wide selection of final projects. The paragraph below lists several guidelines for the selection and assessment in order to ensure a balanced selection and equal treatment.

In the information dossier, the programme must describe how it has tested the achievement of the learning outcomes. Such tests may be based on various products or examinations that are summarised here in the concept of a final project. A non-exhaustive account of final projects is: the final thesis, a portfolio, a professional product, an interim exam or series of interim exams, a paper, an artistic achievement, or a combination thereof. The panel focuses on the products or tests with which students complete their programme.

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Selection of final projects

In order to assess the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will select and examine recent final projects from a minimum of 15 graduates of the programme. To this end, the programme will provide the panel with a list of student numbers and the information required to make an adequate selection. In the event of a programme that has produced fewer than 15 graduates in the period to be assessed, the panel will examine all the final projects.

The selection must comprise a reasonable balance between satisfactory, good, and very good final projects. The selection must be compiled in a manner that enables the panel to give its substantiated opinion on the satisfactory-unsatisfactory cutting scores observed by the programme, on the general level of the final projects, on the grading of the final projects, and on the grading methods observed.

The selection shows sufficient diversity in terms of modes of study, locations, specialisations, graduation tracks, and curricula in order to identify any differences in quality. To this end, the panel may decide to raise the number of final projects to be assessed.

Structure of the assessment procedure

The assessment is aimed at enabling the panel to give its opinion on the achievement of the learning outcomes, the manner in which these have been assessed, and the manner in which the programme is safeguarding the proper assessment of final projects.

Prior to the site visit, the programme enables the panel to form an opinion of these final projects and their assessment by the programme. Prior to the preliminary consultations, the panel has examined the final projects and the panel members have shared their findings with one another. A final project being called into question by one panel member will additionally be examined by at least one other panel member. The panel is free to request more final projects in order to gain a better picture of whether the quality of the final projects is up to standard. In exceptional cases, the panel may examine the final projects during its site visit, for example, in procedures involving performing arts programmes.

During the site visit, the panel interviews assessors/examiners of the programme in order to gain proper insight into the ways in which the assessment has come about and the achievement of the exit level is monitored.

3.2.1 Supplementary notes relating to limited initial accreditation assessments

- The panel, and by extension NVAO comment on the allocation of the programme to a CROHO sector. The Central Register of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO) distinguishes the following sectors: Education, Agriculture and the Natural Environment, Science, Engineering and Technology, Health Care, Economics, Law, Behaviour and Society, Language and Culture, and Cross-sector Programmes.
- In the event of professional higher education programmes, the panel recommends an appropriate suffix to the degree conferred by the programme. Based on this recommendation, NVAO sets down a conclusion regarding the suffix to the degree, and includes this in its decision.

3.2.2 Panel judgements and assessment rules for limited programme assessments (initial accreditation of new programmes)

> **Judgement per standard**
> *The panel scores each standard:*

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	Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
	Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Does not meet the standard:	The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.
Generic quality:		*The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.*

Final conclusion

In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:

	Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
	Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Negative:	*In the following situations:* - The programme fails to meet one or more standards; - The programme partially meets standard 1; - The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel; - The programme partially meets three or more standards.

Additional assessment rules regarding conditions

	A score of "partially meets the standard" means that a programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed. When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the programme to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative". NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative".

3.3   Extensive framework

Intended learning outcomes
Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the

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discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations. The points of departure for the set-up of the programme chime with the educational philosophy and the profile of the institution. The intended learning outcomes are periodically evaluated.

Curriculum; orientation
Standard 2: The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.

The curriculum ties in with current (international) developments, requirements and expectations in the professional field and the discipline. Academic skills and/or research skills and/or professional competencies are substantiated in a manner befitting the orientation and level of the programme.

Curriculum; content
Standard 3: The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum.

Curriculum; learning environment

Standard 4: The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The curriculum is designed in a manner conducive to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). The design of the learning environment chimes with the educational philosophy of the institution. If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name.

Intake
Standard 5: The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

The admission requirements in place are realistic with a view to the intended learning outcomes.
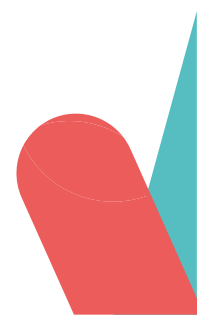
Staff
Standard 6: The staff team is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content and educational expertise. The team size is sufficient.

The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the programme. The teachers have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching. The staff policy is conducive in this respect. Sufficient staff is available to teach the programme and tutor the students.

Facilities
Standard 7: The accommodation and material facilities are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

The accommodation of the programme and the facilities are in keeping with the intended learning outcomes and the teaching-learning environment.

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Tutoring

Standard 8: The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.

Students receive appropriate tutoring (including students with a functional impairment). The information provision of the programme is adequate.

Quality assurance

Standard 9: The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.

The programme organises effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Existing programmes implement appropriate improvements based on the results of the previous assessment. They initiate appropriate evaluation and measurement activities to that end. The outcomes of this evaluation demonstrably constitute the basis for development and improvement. Within the programme, those responsible are held to account regarding the extent to which the programme contributes to the attainment of the institution's strategic goals. Quality assurance ensures the achievement of the intended learning results. The programme committee, examination board, staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field are actively involved in the programme's internal quality assurance. The programme's design processes, its recognition, and its quality assurance are in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines. The programme publishes accurate, reliable information regarding its quality, which is easily accessible to the target groups.

Student assessment

Standard 10: The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The examining board exerts its legal authority. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

As a rule, standard 11 is not addressed in an initial accreditation assessment. The panel will only assess this standard if, in the opinion of NVAO, the procedure involves an existing programme and final projects are available to be assessed.
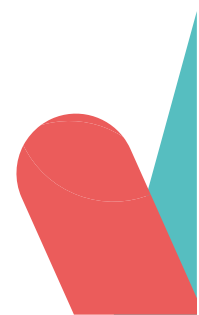
Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 11: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes.

Note regarding the assessment of achieved learning outcomes

In the event of an initial accreditation assessment that also covers existing programme components, the panel will assess standard 11. To this end, the panel will examine a wide selection of final projects. The paragraph below lists several guidelines for the selection and assessment in order to ensure a balanced selection and equal treatment.

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In the information dossier, the programme must describe how it has tested the achievement of the learning outcomes. Such tests may be based on various products or examinations that are summarised here in the concept of a final project. A non-exhaustive account of final projects is: the final thesis, a portfolio, a professional product, an interim exam or series of interim exams, a paper, an artistic achievement, or a combination thereof. The panel focuses on the products or tests with which students complete their programme.

Selection of final projects

In order to assess the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will select and examine recent final projects from a minimum of 15 graduates of the programme. To this end, the programme will provide the panel with a list of student numbers and the information required to make an adequate selection. In the event of a programme that has produced fewer than 15 graduates in the period to be assessed, the panel will examine all the final projects.

The selection must comprise a reasonable balance between satisfactory, good, and very good final projects. The selection must be compiled in a manner that enables the panel to give its substantiated opinion on the satisfactory-unsatisfactory cutting scores observed by the programme, on the general level of the final projects, on the grading of the final projects, and on the grading methods observed.

The selection shows sufficient diversity in terms of modes of study, locations, specialisations, graduation tracks, and curricula in order to identify any differences in quality. To this end, the panel may decide to raise the number of final projects to be assessed.

Structure of the assessment procedure

The assessment is aimed at enabling the panel to give its opinion on the achievement of the learning outcomes, the manner in which these have been assessed, and the manner in which the programme is safeguarding the proper assessment of final projects.

Prior to the site visit, the programme enables the panel to form an opinion of these final projects and their assessment by the programme. Prior to the preliminary consultations, the panel has examined the final projects and the panel members have shared their findings with one another. A final project being called into question by one panel member will additionally be examined by at least one other panel member. The panel is free to request more final projects in order to gain a better picture of whether the quality of the final projects is up to standard. In exceptional cases, the panel may examine the final projects during its site visit, for example, in procedures involving performing arts programmes.

During the site visit, the panel interviews assessors/examiners of the programme in order to gain proper insight into the ways in which the assessment has come about and the achievement of the exit level is monitored.

3.3.1 Supplementary notes relating to extensive initial accreditation assessments

- The panel, and by extension NVAO comment on the allocation of the programme to a CROHO sector. The Central Register of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO) distinguishes the following sectors: Education, Agriculture and the Natural Environment, Science, Engineering and Technology, Health Care, Economics, Law, Behaviour and Society, Language and Culture, and Cross-sector Programmes.

- In the event of professional higher education programmes, the panel recommends an appropriate suffix to the degree conferred by the programme. Based on this recommendation, NVAO sets down a conclusion regarding the suffix to the degree, and includes this in its decision.

3.3.2 Assessment after three years

New programmes that have passed an extensive initial accreditation assessment and are not yet providing actual education are required to have the following two quality aspects assessed three years after initial accreditation has been granted:

- the level achieved, with a view to what is desirable and customary from an international perspective;
- the validity of the assessment, testing, and examination of the students.

An independent panel that has been approved by NVAO will conduct the assessment on the basis of interim tests or final projects demonstrating the level achieved. The institution must forward the advisory report pertaining to this assessment to NVAO no later than two and a half years after the decision to grant initial accreditation. This requirement only applies if the institution providing the programme does not hold a (conditionally) positive institutional audit decision and if the outcomes achieved have not yet been assessed in the initial accreditation assessment.

3.3.3 Panel judgements and assessment rules for extensive programme assessments (initial accreditation of new programmes)

Judgement per standard		
The panel scores each standard:		
	Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
	Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Does not meet the standard:	The programme fails to meet the generic quality standard.
Generic quality:	*The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.*	
Final conclusion		
In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:		
	Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
	Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of five standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Negative:	*In the following situations:* - The programme does not meet one or more standards; - The programme partially meets standard 1; - The programme partially meets one to five standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;

		- The programme partially meets six or more standards.
Additional assessment rules regarding conditions		
		A score of "partially meets the standard" means that an institution meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.
		When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the institution to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative".
		NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative".

3.4   Assessment process for initial accreditation assessments

3.4.1   Application and information dossier

The institution submits an application for initial accreditation assessment to NVAO. The information dossier is structured in accordance with the standards of the assessment framework and forms part of the application. The information dossier is a self-contained document comprising a maximum of 15 pages for the limited framework or a maximum of 20 pages for the extensive framework, in both cases excluding appendices. In addition to an information dossier, existing documents of the programmes may also be used.

The initial accreditation assessment of new programmes involves an ex-ante assessment. The information dossier and the appendices provide the panel with a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes for the entire programme, the set-up of the curriculum, the draft teaching and examination regulations, the learning environment, the student assessment, and the composition of the staff team that is going to teach the programme. With respect to the first 60 ECs of the programme, full information on the content of the programme and the student assessment must be available in draft form. In addition, tests must have been elaborated for several components. The programme must provide insight into the methods it intends to employ to assess achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the end of the curriculum.

The panel may request additional documents and information if so required in order to form an opinion. The point of departure is that the programme submits the documents and information that the panel requires to carry out its tasks. However, the panel will exercise restraint in this respect.

The assessment involved in an initial accreditation assessment addresses standards 1, 2, and 3, and the final conclusion of the limited framework, and standards 1 up to and including 10 and the final conclusion of the extensive framework. In principle, the information dossier only outlines these standards. Only in exceptional cases, and if the assessment concerns existing programme components will the achieved learning outcomes (standard 4 of the limited

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framework and standard 11 of the extensive framework) be assessed as well. In such cases, the dossier must provide information on these standards and on the final projects that will be submitted to the panel for review.

Obligation to provide information

When applying for accreditation or initial accreditation (and in the report submitted to retain accreditation), institutions are required to list all the specialisations, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the programme in question. Courses of study that have not been reported are not covered by the accreditation.

Withdrawal of applications

The institution is free to withdraw its application during the entire assessment procedure, up to such time as NVAO has taken a final decision – in the manner set out in the Dutch General Administrative Law Act – and has published such decision.

Under the European Standards and Guidelines, NVAO is obliged to publish all assessment reports, including those involving a negative conclusion. The administrative review will commence upon the submission of the advisory report to NVAO by the panel chair. In all cases, this will lead to the publication of the advisory report. If the institution chooses to withdraw its application before the panel chair has submitted the advisory report to NVAO, NVAO will not publish the advisory report.

3.4.2   Panel composition

The peers conducting programme assessments are independent, authoritative in their discipline, and jointly command the following expertise:
- up-to-date knowledge of the relevant discipline;
- extensive and recent teaching and testing experience in the same type of education (professional higher education / academic higher education, Master's / Bachelor's / Associate Degree programmes);
- ability to compare the programme in an international perspective;
- recent experience in the (international) professional field of the discipline concerned;
- experience with peer review in higher education;
- recent experience as a higher education student;
- if applicable: knowledge of a specific teaching concept;
- if applicable: expertise related to the distinctive feature for which the programme has applied.

The panel is composed of a minimum of four members, among whom at least one higher education student. The panel is supported by an NVAO process coordinator who monitors the propriety of the assessment process and ensures that the panel judgements are formed in accordance with the framework. A secretary who commands the expertise listed in paragraph 2.3 (Assessments) of this framework reports on the assessment process. The process coordinator and the secretary do not sit on the panel.

Panel members must meet the following requirements to ensure their independence:
- for at least five years, they have had no direct or indirect ties with the institution to be audited that would lead to (the semblance of) a conflict of interest;
- they are not employed by, nor do they have business interests in, the agency that is organising the assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not;

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- for at least five years, they have not performed any consultancy work for the benefit of the programme to be assessed, or in another context within the institution, whose results could be an object of the assessment.

These requirements also apply to panel secretaries, with the exception that secretaries may be employed by an agency that is organising an assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not. Based on its role as the "gatekeeper" of the accredited higher education system, NVAO convenes and appoints the panels responsible for the initial accreditation assessments. NVAO also coordinates the assessments.

Prior to the assessment, the panel members and the secretary sign a declaration of independence. Upon appointing the panel members, NVAO must also approve the appointment of the secretary, prior to the assessment.

Panel preparations

The panel chair has been trained in accordance with the NVAO requirements. The panel agrees on the approach to be adopted. Prior to the site visit, the panel has perused the programme's information dossier. In a subsequent preparatory internal panel meeting, the panel discusses the information dossier and the underlying documents. The process coordinator explains the framework and the assessment procedure, and the attitude expected from the panel members during the interviews. In addition, the process coordinator ensures calibration of the panel by going over the interpretation of the standards, judgements, and assessment rules. Furthermore, the panel formulates the questions it will pose to the discussion partners during the site visit.

The panel conducts a peer review, i.e., assessment by peers occupies centre stage. The panel's attitude and working methods correspond to this point of departure. This means, for example, that the panel operates on the basis of trust and respects the principles of the institution, conducts an open dialogue with the institution, does justice to the various perspectives of quality, and contributes to improvement.

Formation of judgements

Within the panel, judgements are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. Equal justice is done to the various perspectives of quality represented on the panel, including the student perspective. In this respect, the panel strives for consensus.

3.4.3 Site visit

A site visit in the purview of the initial accreditation assessment of a new programme takes, in principle, one day. The programme proposes a schedule for the site visit which includes the sequence of the interviews, types of interviews, participants, and duration. The panel honours such a proposal wherever possible and may request adjustments to further the formation of reliable judgements.

3.4.4 Reports

In a concise advisory report, the panel provides insight into the findings and considerations underpinning its judgements. The standards and assessment rules from the relevant framework are leading in this report. The advisory report opens with a brief, concise summary aimed at a wider reading public. The report closes with a score table reflecting the judgements on each standard and a well-reasoned final conclusion. The advisory report may comprise recommendations for improvement. The advisory report underpins the accreditation decision by NVAO. NVAO publishes its accreditation decision and the advisory report.

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An appendix to the report comprises the composition of the panel, stating the names, current position(s), and, where relevant, former position(s) of the panel members, the name of the secretary, the approach adopted by the panel, the date and schedule of the site visit (including an indication of the discussion partners), and a list of the documents examined. With respect to its approach, the panel sets out how it has prepared the assessment in its preparatory consultations. If applicable, the report sets out how the panel has formed an opinion of the learning outcomes achieved, stating the number of final projects examined, including the number of any additional projects requested.

The chair will endorse the draft advisory report after the panel members have approved its contents. The institution receives this draft advisory report in order to correct any factual inaccuracies. The institution is allowed a period of two weeks to do so. The panel will incorporate the response provided by the institution and subsequently, the chair will endorse the final report, after all the panel members have approved it. Thereupon, the panel chair will submit the report to NVAO.

3.4.5 Assessment of conditions

In the event that a new programme has been granted conditional initial accreditation and NVAO has set a time frame for satisfaction of the conditions, the institution must have a panel assess whether the programme has satisfied the conditions. Prior to expiry of such a time frame, the institution must submit a report on such an assessment to NVAO. The maximum time frame for satisfaction of conditions is two years.

In principle, the panel that has conducted the initial accreditation assessment must verify whether the programme has satisfied the conditions, including the student member, even if he/she has meanwhile graduated. The panel does not need to be re-approved by NVAO to this end, unless its composition has changed. In such cases, NVAO must verify whether the changed panel, as a whole, commands the required expertise. At the time of re-assessment, the panel must still meet the independency requirement. NVAO may decide to adjust the composition of the assessment panel. The panel decides on the approach to be adopted in the assessment process. The panel submits an advisory report to the institution. The institution submits the report to the NVAO board.

If the assessment of the conditions turns out positive – i.e., if the programme meets the quality requirements – NVAO will grant the new programme initial accreditation. If the re-assessment shows that the programme has failed to satisfy the conditions within the time frame stipulated, NVAO will decide to refuse the initial accreditation.

3.5 Comprehensive initial accreditation

The first (Bachelor's or Master's) programme provided by an organisation aiming to be regarded by the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science as a "recognised private institution" (rechtspersoon hoger onderwijs) and to provide accredited programmes will be subjected to an "comprehensive" initial accreditation assessment. The aggravated initial accreditation assessment cannot be conducted on the basis of an Associate Degree programme.

The procedure for admission to the system of accredited programmes comprises two components. In addition to the requirements that apply to the extensive assessment of existing programmes, a recognised private institution must demonstrate that it has safeguarded the quality and continuity of the programme in the purview of which it is applying for the comprehensive initial accreditation assessment. The latter assessment is conducted by the Inspectie van het Onderwijs (Inspectorate of Education).

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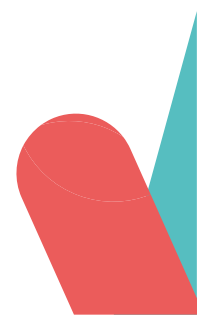NVAO • Netherlands • Confidence in quality

Full cycle requirement

The comprehensive initial accreditation assessment reviews the achieved learning outcomes. The quality of the education provided must be demonstrably up to standard. The full curriculum must have been provided and completed by students. Programmes that comprise different modes of study or specialisations must submit a representative number of final projects of such modes of study or specialisations.

Framework and assessment rules

Even though this procedure pertains to new programmes, NVAO will assess the quality of the programme on the basis of the extensive framework for existing programmes, as the comprehensiveness revolves around the fact that it involves an assessment of proven quality rather than an ex-ante assessment. That is why NVAO observes different assessment rules in such cases: all the standards must be met. The final conclusion can only be positive or negative.

Judgement per standard		
The panel scores each standard:		
	Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
	Does not meet the standard:	The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.
Generic quality:	*The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Bachelor's or Master's programme.*	
Final conclusion		
In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:		
	Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
	Negative:	The programme fails to meet one or more standards.

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4   Assessment of existing programmes

4.1   Introduction

The assessment of existing programmes involves an "external assessment" (visitatie) carried out by an NVAO approved panel of independent, expert peers. The programmes must demonstrate that their educational practice meets the standards. The assessment focuses on the quality achieved and addresses the intended learning outcomes, the structure of the curriculum, the learning environment, student assessment, the teaching staff, and the quality achieved.

Limited and extensive frameworks

Programmes offered by institutions that have passed an institutional audit (instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg) may be assessed in accordance with the limited framework. When the limited framework is used, the panel is requested to avoid any overlap with the institutional audit. The limited framework is focused on the substantive quality of the programme, including the required learning environment and the teaching staff. Topics that are left out of consideration are: institution-wide quality assurance and quality culture aspects, the student assessment policy pursued by the institution, its staff policy, its services and facilities, and alignment with the institution's educational philosophy. After all, these aspects have already been assessed during the institutional audit. The extensive framework, on the other hand, also considers the embedding of the programme in the institution's policy, the services and facilities, quality assurance and quality culture.

Object of the assessment

The assessment of the quality of an existing programme addresses the curriculum and the learning environment in place at the time of assessment. The programme informs the panel of any significant developments since its previous assessment and of any changes to the curriculum. The panel refrains from a retrospective assessment of changes in the programme. The panel takes note of recommendations ensuing from a previous assessment if such recommendations still hold relevance to the current curriculum or the learning environment, and it assesses the manner in which the programme has followed up such recommendations.

Obligation to provide information

When applying for accreditation or initial accreditation assessment (and in the report submitted to retain accreditation), institutions are required to list all the courses of study, modes of study, locations, and statutory requirements associated with the programme in question. Courses of study that have not been reported are not covered by the accreditation.

4.2   Limited framework

Intended learning outcomes
Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.

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Teaching-learning environment
Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The diversity of the students admitted is taken into account in this respect. The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the curriculum, and provide appropriate guidance. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name. The teaching staff must have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching. Services and facilities are not assessed, unless they have been set up specifically for the programme concerned.

Student assessment
Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The requirements are transparent to the students. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Achieved learning outcomes
Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes.
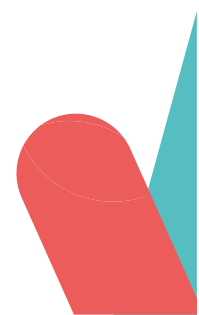
Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

Note regarding the assessment of achieved learning outcomes

Within the context of assessing the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will examine a wide selection of final projects. The paragraph below lists several guidelines for the selection and assessment in order to ensure a balanced selection and equal treatment.

In the selfevaluation, the programme must describe how it has tested the achievement of the learning outcomes. Such tests may be based on various products or examinations that are summarised here in the concept of a final project. A non-exhaustive account of final projects is: the final thesis, a portfolio, a professional product, an interim exam or series of interim exams, a paper, an artistic achievement, or a combination thereof. The panel focuses on the products or tests with which students complete their programme.

Selection of final projects

In order to assess the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will select and examine recent final projects from a minimum of 15 graduates of the programme. To this end, the programme will provide the panel with a list of student numbers and the information required to make an

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adequate selection. In the event of a programme that has produced fewer than 15 graduates in the period to be assessed, the panel will examine all the final projects.

The selection must comprise a reasonable balance between satisfactory, good, and very good final projects. The selection must be compiled in a manner that enables the panel to give its substantiated opinion on the satisfactory-unsatisfactory cutting scores observed by the programme, on the general level of the final projects, on the grading of the final projects, and on the grading methods observed.

The selection shows sufficient diversity in terms of modes of study, locations, specialisations, graduation tracks, and curricula in order to identify any differences in quality. To this end, the panel may decide to raise the number of final projects to be assessed.

Structure of the assessment procedure

The assessment is aimed at enabling the panel to give its opinion on the achievement of the learning outcomes, the manner in which these have been assessed, and the manner in which the programme is safeguarding the proper assessment of final projects.

Prior to the site visit, the programme enables the panel to form an opinion of these final projects and their assessment by the programme. Prior to the preliminary consultations, the panel has examined the final projects and the panel members have shared their findings with one another. A final project being called into question by one panel member will additionally be examined by at least one other panel member. The panel is free to request more final projects in order to gain a better picture of whether the quality of the final projects is up to standard. In exceptional cases, the panel may examine the final projects during its site visit, for example, in procedures involving performing arts programmes.

During the site visit, the panel interviews assessors/examiners of the programme in order to gain proper insight into the ways in which the assessment has come about and the achievement of the exit level is monitored.

4.2.1 Panel judgements and assessment rules for limited programme assessments (existing programmes)

Judgement per standard		
The panel scores each standard:		
	Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
	Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Does not meet the standard:	The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.
Generic quality:	*The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.*	
Final conclusion		
In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:		
	Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
	Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of two standards, with the imposition of conditions being

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		recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Negative:	*In the following situations:* - The programme fails to meet one or more standards; - The programme partially meets standard 1; - The programme partially meets one or two standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel; - The programme partially meets three or more standards.
Additional assessment rules regarding conditions		
	A score of "partially meets the standard" means that a programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed. When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the programme to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative". NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative".	

4.3 Extensive framework

Intended learning outcomes
Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.
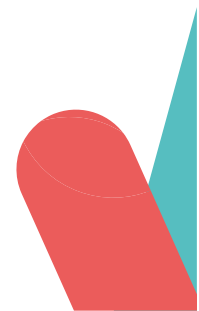
The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's) as defined in the Dutch Qualifications Framework, as well as its orientation (professional or academic). In addition, they tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations. The points of departure for the set-up of the programme chime with the educational philosophy and the profile of the institution. The intended learning outcomes are periodically evaluated.

Curriculum; orientation
Standard 2: The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.

The curriculum ties in with current (international) developments, requirements and expectations in the professional field and the discipline. Academic skills and/or research skills and/or professional competencies are substantiated in a manner befitting the orientation and level of the programme.

Curriculum; content

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Standard 3: The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum.

Curriculum; learning environment
Standard 4: The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The curriculum is designed in a manner conducive to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centred approach). The design of the learning environment chimes with the educational philosophy of the institution. If the programme is taught in a language other than Dutch, the programme must justify its choice. This also applies if the programme bears a foreign language name.

Intake
Standard 5: The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

The admission requirements in place are realistic with a view to the intended learning outcomes.

Staff
Standard 6: The staff team is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content and educational expertise. The team size is sufficient.

The teachers have sufficient expertise in terms of both subject matter and teaching methods to teach the programme. The teachers have a sufficient command of the language in which they are teaching. The staff policy is conducive in this respect. Sufficient staff is available to teach the programme and tutor the students.

Facilities
Standard 7: The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

The accommodation of the programme and the facilities are in keeping with the intended learning outcomes and the teaching-learning environment.
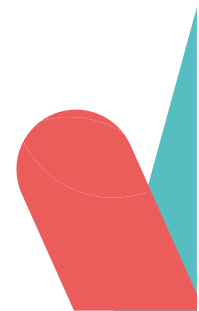
Tutoring
Standard 8: The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.

Students receive appropriate tutoring (including students with a functional impairment). The information provision of the programme is adequate.

Quality assurance
Standard 9: The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.

The programme organises effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Existing programmes implement appropriate improvements based on the results of the previous assessment. They initiate appropriate evaluation and measurement activities to that end. The outcomes of this evaluation demonstrably constitute the basis for

development and improvement. Within the institution, those responsible are held to account regarding the extent to which the programme contributes to the attainment of the institution's strategic goals. Quality assurance ensures the achievement of the intended learning results. The programme committee, examination board, staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field are actively involved in the programme's internal quality assurance. The programme's design processes, its recognition, and its quality assurance are in keeping with the European Standards and Guidelines. The programme publishes accurate, reliable information regarding its quality, which is easily accessible to the target groups.

Student assessment
Standard 10: The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.

The student assessments are valid, reliable and sufficiently independent. The quality of interim and final examinations is sufficiently safeguarded and meets the statutory quality standards. The examining board exerts its legal authority. The tests support the students' own learning processes.

Achieved learning outcomes
Standard 11: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

The achievement of the intended learning outcomes is demonstrated by the results of tests, the final projects, and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes.

Final conclusion (weighted and substantiated)

Note regarding the assessment of achieved learning outcomes

Within the context of assessing the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will examine a wide selection of final projects. The paragraph below lists several guidelines for the selection and assessment in order to ensure a balanced selection and equal treatment.

In the selfevaluation, the programme must describe how it has tested the achievement of the learning outcomes. Such tests may be based on various products or examinations that are summarised here in the concept of a final project. A non-exhaustive account of final projects is: the final thesis, a portfolio, a professional product, an interim exam or series of interim exams, a paper, an artistic achievement, or a combination thereof. The panel focuses on the products or tests with which students complete their programme.

Selection of final projects

In order to assess the learning outcomes achieved, the panel will select and examine recent final projects from a minimum of 15 graduates of the programme. To this end, the programme will provide the panel with a list of student numbers and the information required to make an adequate selection. In the event of a programme that has produced fewer than 15 graduates in the period to be assessed, the panel will examine all the final projects.

The selection must comprise a reasonable balance between satisfactory, good, and very good final projects. The selection must be compiled in a manner that enables the panel to give its substantiated opinion on the satisfactory-unsatisfactory cutting scores observed by the programme, on the general level of the final projects, on the grading of the final projects, and on the grading methods observed.

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The selection shows sufficient diversity in terms of modes of study, locations, specialisations, graduation tracks, and curricula in order to identify any differences in quality. To this end, the panel may decide to raise the number of final projects to be assessed.

Structure of the assessment procedure

The assessment is aimed at enabling the panel to give its opinion on the achievement of the learning outcomes, the manner in which these have been assessed, and the manner in which the programme is safeguarding the proper assessment of final projects.

Prior to the site visit, the programme enables the panel to form an opinion of these final projects and their assessment by the programme. Prior to the preliminary consultations, the panel has examined the final projects and the panel members have shared their findings with one another. A final project being called into question by one panel member will additionally be examined by at least one other panel member. The panel is free to request more final projects in order to gain a better picture of whether the quality of the final projects is up to standard. In exceptional cases, the panel may examine the final projects during its site visit, for example, in procedures involving performing arts programmes.

During the site visit, the panel interviews assessors/examiners of the programme in order to gain proper insight into the ways in which the assessment has come about and the achievement of the exit level is monitored.

4.3.1 Panel judgements and assessment rules for extensive programme assessments (existing programmes)

Judgement per standard		
The panel scores each standard according to the following scale:		
	Meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard.
	Partially meets the standard:	The programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Does not meet the standard:	The programme does not meet the generic quality standard.
Generic quality:	*The quality that, from an international perspective, may reasonably be expected from a higher education Associate Degree, Bachelor's or Master's programme.*	
Final conclusion		
In addition, the panel recommends a weighted and substantiated final conclusion regarding the programme, based on the following assessment rules:		
	Positive:	The programme meets all the standards.
	Conditionally positive:	The programme meets standard 1 and partially meets a maximum of five standards, with the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel (see Additional assessment rules regarding conditions).
	Negative:	*In the following situations:* - The programme fails to meet one or more standards; - The programme partially meets standard 1; - The programme partially meets one to five standards, without the imposition of conditions being recommended by the panel;

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		- The programme partially meets six or more standards.
Additional assessment rules regarding conditions		
	A score of "partially meets the standard" means that a programme meets the generic quality standard to a significant extent, but improvements are required in order to fully meet the standard. To this end, conditions will be imposed.	

When presenting a final conclusion of "conditionally positive", a panel must review whether it is feasible for the programme to demonstrate its realisation of such improvements within a period of two years. Only if it determines that achieving such an improvement is a realistic goal will the panel recommend the imposition of conditions. In such cases, the panel will set down the conditions to be imposed in concrete terms. If the panel deems achievement of the necessary improvements within two years not feasible, the final conclusion will be "negative".

NVAO decides on the imposition of conditions for the programme. If it determines that is not realistic for the conditions to be satisfied within two years, it will refrain from setting down conditions and award a final conclusion of "negative".

4.4 Assessment process for existing programmes

4.4.1 Application

Programmes holding initial accreditation and wishing to obtain accreditation as an existing programme must submit an application for accreditation to NVAO by no later than the submission deadline applicable to their assessment cluster, along with an assessment report. For programmes that have already obtained accreditation as an existing programme, the submission of an assessment report to NVAO by no later than the submission deadline will suffice. The submission deadline is strictly observed. Not keeping the deadline will prompt NVAO to withdraw accreditation.

4.4.2 Assessment in assessment clusters

Existing programmes are assessed in assessment clusters. NVAO assigns programmes to an assessment cluster – on the recommendation of the institution – and sets the date for submission of applications. Application regulations and amendments are published on the NVAO website. NVAO processes applications and amendments once a year in the "April round". Prior to the accreditation process, programmes within an assessment cluster may collectively consult with NVAO regarding the structure of the accreditation process.

4.4.3 Self-evaluation and appendices

The institution draws up a self-evaluation describing the programme's strengths and weaknesses. The self-evaluation report is a self-contained document comprising a maximum of 15 pages for the limited framework or a maximum of 20 pages for the extensive framework, in both cases excluding appendices. The institution may contact the panel to agree on another format or scope for the self-evaluation report. In addition to a self-evaluation, existing evaluative documents of the programme may also be used. The standards from the assessment framework must be reducible, for example, by means of an explanation. The self-evaluation comprises a contribution submitted by students (student chapter). The programme encourages the establishment of an independent and representative student chapter.

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The programme appends a limited number of appendices to its self-evaluation. These appendices provide insight into the set-up and/or contents of the curriculum, the composition of the staff team, and the teaching and examination regulations.

The panel requests additional documents and information if so required in order to form an opinion. The point of departure is that the programme submits the documents and information that the panel requires to carry out its tasks. However, the panel will exercise restraint in this respect and refrain from requesting information other than that already available with the programme.

4.4.4 Panel composition

The peers conducting programme assessments are independent, authoritative in their discipline, and jointly command the following expertise:
- up-to-date knowledge of the relevant discipline;
- extensive and recent teaching and testing experience in the same type of education (professional higher education / academic higher education, Master's / Bachelor's / Associate Degree programmes);
- ability to compare the programme in an international perspective;
- recent experience in the (international) professional field of the discipline concerned;
- experience with peer reviews in higher education;
- recent experience as a higher education student;
- if applicable: knowledge of a specific teaching concept;
- if applicable: expertise related to the distinctive feature for which the programme has applied.
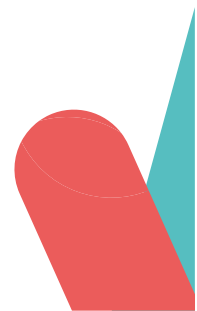
The panel is composed of a minimum of four members, among whom at least one higher education student. The panel is supported by a secretary who commands the expertise listed in paragraph 2.3 (Assessments) of this framework. This secretary monitors the propriety of the assessment process, ensures that the panel judgements are formed in accordance with the framework, and reports on the assessment process. The secretary does not sit on the panel. NVAO will formulate a detailed description of the peer review process to ensure the formation of consistent and reliable judgements.

Panel members must meet the following requirements to ensure their independence:
- for at least five years, they have had no direct or indirect ties with the institution to be audited that would lead to (the semblance of) a conflict of interest;
- they are not employed by, nor do they have business interests in, the agency that is organising the assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not;
- for at least five years, they have not performed any consultancy work for the benefit of the programme to be assessed, or in another context within the institution, whose results could be an object of the assessment.

These requirements also apply to panel secretaries, with the exception that secretaries may be employed by an agency that is organising an assessment, whether commissioned by an institution or not.

Prior to the assessment, the panel members and the secretary sign a declaration of independence. Upon appointing the panel members, NVAO must also approve the appointment of the secretary, prior to the assessment. NVAO draws up guidelines for the manner in which institutions may substantiate the expertise and independence of panel members and the panel secretary in the application for approval of the composition of a panel.

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Assessment clusters

Existing programmes are assessed in assessment clusters. "Unique" programmes constitute a separate assessment cluster. A single panel conducts a comparative assessment of the entire cluster. For reasons of independence, specific expertise, and availability of panel members, the composition may differ from one programme to the next. However, the various compositions must "overlap" sufficiently in order to ensure consistency in the comparative assessment.

The boards of the institutions concerned (or a coordinator acting on their behalf) submit a coordinated proposal regarding the panel composition to NVAO for approval, listing the secretary. The secretary does not formally sit on the panel. He supports the judgement formation process but does not have a say in it. The proposal specifies how (interconnection in) the panel will contribute to a consistent comparison between the programmes. NVAO assesses the competence, independence, and interconnection of the panel on the basis of the above criteria.

Panel preparations

The panel chair has been trained in accordance with the NVAO requirements. The panel agrees on the approach to be adopted. Prior to the site visit, the panel has perused the programme's information dossier. In a subsequent preparatory internal panel meeting, the panel discusses the information dossier and the underlying documents. The secretary explains the framework and the assessment procedure, and the attitude expected from the panel members during the interviews. In addition, the secretary ensures calibration of the panel by going over the interpretation of the standards, judgements, and assessment rules. Furthermore, the panel formulates the questions it will pose to the discussion partners during the site visit.

The panel conducts a peer review, i.e., assessment by peers occupies centre stage. The panel's attitude and working methods correspond to this point of departure. This means, for example, that the panel operates on the basis of trust and respects the principles of the institution, conducts an open dialogue with the institution, does justice to the various perspectives of quality, and contributes to improvement.

Formation of judgements

Within the panel, judgements are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. Equal justice is done to the various perspectives of quality represented on the panel, including the student perspective. In this respect, the panel strives for consensus.

4.4.5   Site visit

The site visit takes, in principle, one day and is composed of two elements:
1. Assessment in the purview of accreditation and improvement: the programme proposes a schedule for the site visit which includes the sequence of the interviews, types of interviews, participants, and duration. The schedule must, as a minimum, feature separate sessions with students and staff. The panel honours such a proposal wherever possible and may request adjustments to further the formation of reliable judgements.
2. In addition, the programme conducts a so-called development dialogue with the panel, discussing potential improvements from a development perspective. The assessment framework does not stipulate any further requirements regarding the structure of such a dialogue.

The panel offers students, staff, and other stakeholders of the programme who have not been included in the site visit schedule the opportunity to bring to the attention of the panel those matters they deem of importance to the assessment, in confidence and without involving the

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programme management. The institution will notify those concerned of this opportunity and inform them how they may contact the panel secretary. The panel must be contacted prior to or during the site visit.

4.4.6   Report

The assessment report is composed of several elements:
1. Assessment report: the panel provides insight into the findings underpinning its judgements and summarises them into a concise assessment report. The standards and assessment rules from the relevant framework are leading in this report. It outlines the strengths and points for improvement of the programme with respect to each standard and with respect to the programme as a whole. The report opens with a brief, concise summary aimed at a wider reading public. The report closes with a score table reflecting the judgements on each standard and a weighted and substantiated final conclusion. The advisory report underpins the accreditation decision by NVAO. NVAO publishes its accreditation decision and the advisory report;

2. An appendix to the report comprises the composition of the panel, stating the names, current position(s), and, where relevant, former position(s) of the panel members, the approach adopted by the panel, the date and schedule of the site visit (including names and positions of the discussion partners), and a list of the documents examined. With respect to the approach adopted by the panel, the report sets out how the panel has prepared the assessment in its preparatory consultations. The panel provides information regarding any additional guidelines or operationalisations with which it has been supplied in the purview of the interpretation of the framework. Furthermore, the panel sets out how it has formed an opinion of the learning outcomes achieved, stating the number of final projects examined, including the number of any additional projects requested.

3. The panel sets down the outcomes of the development dialogue and draws up a separate document that is not part of the application for accreditation. The publication of such a document is subject to statutory requirements.

The chair will endorse the draft advisory report after the panel members have approved its contents. The institution receives this draft advisory report in order to correct any factual inaccuracies. The institution is allowed a period of two weeks to do so. The panel will incorporate the response provided by the institution and subsequently, the chair will endorse the final report, after all the panel members have approved it.

4.4.7   Assessment of conditions

The panel assessing an existing programme may indicate that it has identified shortcomings that may be remedied within the foreseeable future and give a final conclusion of conditionally positive. In such cases, the institution must draw up a plan to remedy the shortcomings, requesting advice to this end from the programme committee if a programme committee is statutorily required or, if such a committee is not statutorily required, from the panel.

The institution appends the plan for improvement and the recommendations of the programme committee or the panel to the assessment report and submits these documents to NVAO by no later than the submission deadline. On the basis of the report, the plan for improvement, and the recommendations, NVAO will decide to grant conditional accreditation of an existing programme, and set down conditions and the time frame within which the programme must satisfy such conditions. The maximum time frame will be two years. In this respect, NVAO will

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consider the pros and cons independently based on the assessment report, the plan for improvement, and the recommendations.

The institution will commission a reassessment and submit the report on this re-assessment to NVAO before expiry of the aforementioned time frame. In principle, the panel that has conducted the original assessment must verify whether the programme has satisfied the conditions, including the student member, even if he/she has meanwhile graduated. The panel does not need to be re-approved by NVAO if its composition has not changed. If it has changed, NVAO must verify whether the changed panel, as a whole, still commands the required expertise. At the time of re-assessment, the panel must still meet the independency requirement.

If the assessment of the conditions turns out positive – i.e., if the programme fully meets the quality requirements – the institution will keep its existing programme accreditation. If the re-assessment shows that the programme has failed to satisfy the conditions within the time frame stipulated, NVAO will decide to withdraw the accreditation of the existing programme.

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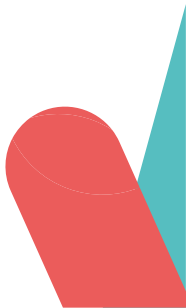
5   Other assessments

Other procedures may apply in combination with programme assessments. This is the case, for example, with applications for assessment of:

- extensions of course durations;
- joint programmes or joint degrees;
- distinctive features;
- Research Master's programmes;
- transnational education;
- changes to programme names.

The panel will take account of these procedures, insofar as applicable, in its recommendations.

Supplementary documentation in addition to the framework

On its website, NVAO publishes further details regarding the implementation of procedures outlined in the framework. In addition, NVAO publishes protocols regarding self-contained procedures and guidelines that serve as regulating documentation.

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6   Appeals

All decisions taken by NVAO in the context of the procedures described in this framework are open to internal and external appeal on the basis of the "Algemene wet bestuursrecht" (General Administrative Law Act)) and the "Regeling bezwaarschriftenprocedure Awb NVAO" (Appeals procedure Regulations AwB NVAO). NVAO provides further information on this on its website (www.nvao.net).

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7   Publication

Following publication in the Staatscourant (Dutch Government Gazette), the *Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands* will be published on the NVAO website (www.nvao.net).

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Appendix: List of abbreviations and translations

Abbreviations

CROHO	Central Register of Higher Education Programmes
DUO	Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs
Ad	Associate degree programme
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines)
Hbo	Higher profession-oriented education
ITK	Institutional audit
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
PDCA	Plan Do Check Act
TNO	Initial accreditation
WHW	Dutch Higher Education and Research Act
Wo	Academic education

Translations of formal terms and titles of documents

In the translated framework:	In the Dutch framework:
positive institutional audit decision	erkenning ITK
institutional audit	instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg
initial accreditation	accreditatie nieuwe opleiding
external assessment	visitatie
assessment of a new programme	toets nieuwe opleiding
accreditation of an existing programme	accreditatie bestaande opleiding
recognised private institution	rechtspersoon hoger onderwijs
Dutch Accreditation Act 2018	Wet accreditatie op maat
Dutch General Administrative Law Act	Algemene wet bestuursrecht
Inspectorate of Education	Inspectie van het Onderwijs

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