



NVAO ACTIVITY REPORT - 2018

13 MAY 2019



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Contents

Flanders	5
New Flemish quality assurance system 2019-2025 under construction	5
Conversion to Graduate programmes	7
Graduate and Master's in Education programmes	7
Survey of decisions	8
Other activities	8
The Netherlands	9
Assessments at the institutional and programme levels	9
Institutional audits	9
Nearly all existing programmes positive	9
Increase in new programmes on account of Associate Degrees	10
Other applications	11
Other activities	11
International activities	14
Assessment in Luxembourg	14
Danish interest in new Flemish system	14
WFME recognition	14
Other international activities	14
Collaboration with stakeholders	16
NVAO organisation	17
Board and management	17
Office	18

“ In 2018, the Dutch and Flemish higher education sectors once more demonstrated their high quality.

In the Netherlands, some 95 per cent of the re-accreditation procedures resulted in a positive decision last year. In Flanders, the institutional reviews showed that the institutions are propagating a robust view on education and quality, and developing policy accordingly. The quality of education is on the agenda.

This past year, in addition to processing regular dossiers and applications, NVAO has focused a great deal of attention on the development of the quality assurance systems in Flanders and the Netherlands, and on the preparations for new activities. With respect to Flanders, this involved, in particular, the implementation of the new quality assurance system and the assessment of Associate Degree and teaching programmes. With respect to the Netherlands, it involved the elaboration of a new assessment framework in the purview of the Dutch Customised Accreditation Act, to come into effect on 1 February 2019, and the preparations for an advisory report to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science regarding the so-called quality agreements.

At the same time, we have observed that new taskings are presenting themselves within the context of our activities. In the Netherlands, the system as a whole appears to be approaching its limits. The perceived administrative burden is under discussion, as is the credibility of existing methods and procedures. The question is whether peer review is the most appropriate instrument for the assessment of programmes. Another question is whether we should make more use of big data and theme-based or system-wide analyses which are, in part, based on such data: how can you, on the one hand, confer headroom and trust, yet on the other, intervene quickly and effectively when needed? Broader or international curricula entail new requirements in terms of quality assurance systems. Another discussion pertains to the significance of the *European Standards and Guidelines*, the foundation of all the quality assurance activities in Europe. NVAO is actively involved in these discussions; in 2018, we participated in several ways and in several international and national forums, whilst we are also playing a part in the development and innovation of quality assurance systems in Flanders, the Netherlands, and Europe. We will continue on the same footing in 2019. In Flanders, NVAO has conducted intensive debates on the future of internal and external quality assurance, on the methodologies that are best geared to higher education, and on the realisation of a positive cost-benefit balance for all the parties involved. The outcomes of these debates have been accommodated in the new quality assurance system. In the years ahead, NVAO will be organising assessment tailored to the institutions concerned. Customisation befits a relationship based on trust, but obviously calls for substantive and procedural versatility on the part of NVAO. This is a challenge that NVAO will happily take on.

For the organisation itself, 2018 was the first full year in which we operated in accordance with the new differentiated procedures, featuring sufficient room for region-specific approaches and strategies. Our current working method enables us to efficiently process all the applications while preserving the benefits of collaboration, and to accommodate the wishes and priorities formulated by the participating regions. Our working method thus comes fully up to expectations.

On behalf of the Board of NVAO
Dr A.H. Flierman, Chair

Flanders

In May 2018, the Flemish Parliament unanimously endorsed the new Quality Assurance System 2019-2025, which is quite a unique achievement. The system has been prepared by NVAO and was established following close consultations between NVAO, the government of Flanders, university colleges, universities, and students. Through official consultation procedures, but also during interactive SAMENaries, NVAO brings together expectations and fosters the exchange of information and experience.

Furthermore, 2018 was an important year in terms of major reforms. The Associate Degree [HBO-5] programmes were converted to Graduate [non-university higher education] programmes, and within the teacher training programmes, the Graduate and Master's in Education programmes were substantiated. As a result of the reforms, these programmes are regarded as new programmes, which is why they require initial accreditation by NVAO. In an initial accreditation procedure, an independent panel of experts verifies whether the institution concerned satisfies all the requirements for providing high-quality education and for conferring worthy degrees.

New Flemish Quality Assurance System 2019-2025 under construction

In parallel to the legal basis for the new Quality Assurance System 2019-2025, NVAO has developed a new assessment framework for each assessment procedure. These frameworks set out the assessment criteria, the assessment scale, and the different steps in the assessment process.

The new Quality Assurance System 2019-2025 outlines the future supervision of the quality of higher education in Flanders. With respect to the universities and university colleges, the institutional review constitutes the foundation of the system. With effect from the academic year 2020-2021, an external independent panel will review all the university colleges and universities in a standard six-year cycle. The point of departure in this process is the context of the individual institutions. On the one hand, the panel assesses the implementation, monitoring, and adjustment of the educational policy pursued by the institution. On the other hand, the institution must demonstrate its capability of safeguarding the quality of its programmes. Special attention will be focused on the involvement of students and independent, external experts, and the manner in which institutions disseminate information regarding the quality of their programmes. A positive institutional review will result in re-accreditation of the programmes provided by the institution concerned for another six-year term.

New programmes must still undergo an initial assessment and will subsequently need to obtain a positive accreditation decision at the programme level, before an institution may assume responsibility for monitoring the quality of such programmes. Upon a negative institutional review, it is once again up to NVAO to assess the quality of individual programmes by way of external committees.

The institutional review does not extend to other institutions conferring recognised higher education diplomas, such as business schools or the Institute of Tropical Medicine Their programmes are individually assessed by an external quality assurance agency, whereupon they are accredited – or not - by NVAO.

The Flemish quality assurance system is based on trust and vests a large measure of responsibility with the institutions. In order to reflect this principle in the assessment procedures, NVAO and the assessment panels adopt an Evaluating Approach.

The Evaluating Approach is a mindset, an outlook which is directive for the substantiation of the NVAO assessment procedures. Through the Evaluating Approach, the focus is placed on “what” is achieved and “what” is feasible within the applicable context, without focusing on what should be achieved or fleshing out the “how”. The latter falls under the autonomy of the institution or programme. With this stimulating system, NVAO aims to assume a leading position in Europe.

New concept of system-wide analyses

The system encompasses a new concept of system-wide analyses, aimed at mapping out and disseminating best practices. The main goal of these annual analyses is to ensure that the institutions, the government, and other stakeholders continue to learn from one another. Analyses targeting institutions map out educational policy issues; those targeting programmes focus on specific policy or quality assurance aspects.

Over a six-year period, the Flemish university colleges and universities will participate in a minimum of two system-wide analyses. The other institutions may participate of their own accord or be invited by NVAO to participate.

Conversion to Graduate programmes

In September 2018, the first three Graduate programmes in Flanders were given the go-ahead by NVAO. This additional gateway to the university colleges will be in operation with effect from the academic year 2019-2020. It will afford even more young people the opportunity to embark on higher education. For the first time, Adult Education Centre (CVO) students were involved in the assessment procedure. Currently, the Graduate programmes are still organised by a collaborative of Adult Education Centres and university colleges; with effect from the academic year 2019-2020, they will be transferred in full to the university colleges. In order to commence, the Associate Degree programmes need to convert to Graduate programmes and pass an NVAO assessment. The full conversion must be completed by the academic year 2019-2020. In 2018, NVAO already received 67 application dossiers.

Graduate and Master's in Education programmes

Before the summer of 2018, the Flemish government definitively ratified the assessment framework for the Graduate in Education and Master's in Education programmes. With effect from the academic year 2019-2020, university students with the ambition of becoming a teacher will have the option of enrolling in a Master's in Education programme. Experts commanding professional experience and pursuing a teaching career may enrol in a Graduate in Education programme provided by a university college. The Graduate and Master's in Education programmes are regarded as new programmes. Ergo, they are required to pass an initial accreditation procedure. This process follows on from the reform of the teacher training programmes by Flemish Education Minister Hilde Crevits. In 2018, 58 application dossiers were submitted to NVAO for assessment.

Survey of decisions

Table 1: Survey of decisions taken in Flanders in 2018

Number of extensions under the Institutional Review (2018)	
Extension of programme accreditations under the Institutional Review	137
Number of decisions taken in Flanders, excluding extensions under the Institutional Review (2018)	
Bachelor's programmes	19
Master's programmes	17
Graduate programmes	18
Validation of discipline-specific learning outcomes	70
Validation of discipline-specific learning outcome, Associate Degree programmes	1
Panel compositions	14
Total	139
Number of decisions taken in Flanders by type of procedure, excluding extensions under the Institutional Review (2018)	
Initial accreditations	7
Initial accreditations – converted Associate Degree programmes	18
Programme accreditations	27
Equivalence decisions	1
Total	53

Other activities

NVAO contribution to upgrading Flanders higher education register

In 2018, Flemish Education Minister Hilde Crevits launched a fully upgraded version of the online white list for all recognised higher education programmes in Flanders. The upgraded and more easily accessible Higher Education Register has been facilitated through unique, automated data exchange between NVAO and the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances (AHOVOKS). Major efforts have been expended to obviate the need for higher education institutions to doubly register their programmes, and significantly reduce the administrative burden.

Participation in DEQAR project

The NVAO Flanders Department is participating in the DEQAR project initiated by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). The new database featuring assessment reports (DEQAR) was launched at the start of the EHEA Conference of Ministers in Paris which marked its tenth anniversary. By participating in this project, the NVAO decisions pertaining to Flanders and the underlying assessment reports will automatically be published on the DEQAR register. A wide range of international users will thus gain easy access to quality assurance decisions and reports established in accordance with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). DEQAR has been selected for EU co-funding through the EU Erasmus+ programme. Seventeen of the registered EQAR agencies are actively participating as project partners for the technical implementation, with support from the main European stakeholders organisations (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, Education International, ECA), CIMEA (ENIC-NARIC Italy), and Ghent University.

The Netherlands

Assessments at the institutional and programme levels

Table 2: Total number of decisions in the Netherlands (including assessment of satisfaction of conditions / after improvement)

	2017	2018
Institutional audits	2	5
Accreditation of existing programmes	291	509
Initial accreditations	86 ¹	115
Total	386	629

Itemisation:

<u>Accreditation of existing programmes</u>	2017	2018
Research Master's	14	14
Assessment following improvement period	21	2
<u>Initial accreditation</u>		
Initial accreditation of new Associate Degree programmes ²	18	42
Master's in Education	5	-
Assessment of satisfaction of conditions	19	21
Aggravated	3	5
Initial accreditation after 3 years	7	15

Institutional audits

In 2018, five institutions received a positive decision, after the second round of institutional audits commenced the year before. 25 assessments are scheduled for 2019. With respect to many institutions, the plans drawn up under the Quality Agreements are taken into account, in order to enable NVAO to advise the Minister of Education, Culture and Science appropriately and in a timely manner in early 2020.

Nearly all existing programmes positive

In 2018, NVAO assessed a total of 509 existing programmes (versus 291 in 2017). Last year, a positive decision was awarded to more than 95 per cent of the academic programmes (209 programmes). The number of improvement periods (10) accounted for more than 4 per cent, i.e., more than the year before (2 per cent). The total number of assessments in the academic sector more than doubled last year: 219 versus 100 the year before. In the professional higher education sector, NVAO awarded a positive decision to more than 96 per cent of the programmes in 2018 (254 programmes).

¹ This total does not include the seven decisions after three years. This procedure will now be covered by a separate report.

² In 2018, Associate Degree programmes were awarded the programme status; before that, new Associate Degree programmes were also subjected to a fully-fledged initial accreditation procedure.

Table 3: Accreditation of existing programmes in the Netherlands (including decisions following improvement period)

Academic higher education	2017	2018
Positive	96	209
Application withdrawn	2	-
Improvement period	2	10
Academic higher education overall	100	219
Professional higher education		
Positive	163	254
Application withdrawn	1	-
Improvement period	5	10
Professional higher education overall	169	264
Associate Degrees		
Positive	-	25
Application withdrawn	-	-
Improvement period	-	-
Associate Degrees overall	-	25

The number of improvement periods remained below 4 per cent (3 per cent in 2017). In 2018, the first applications for re-accreditation of Associate Degree programmes were submitted. Positive decisions were awarded in all cases.

Both in the academic higher education sector and in the professional higher education sector, the proportion of decisions featuring a final conclusion of “good” fluctuated around 15 per cent in 2018. Among the government-funded programmes, the number of decisions featuring a final conclusion of “good” rose once more. The privately funded sector saw a lesser number of such conclusions. The differentiation in conclusions, for that matter, will terminate upon the introduction of the Customised Accreditation Act, on 1 February 2019.

Increase in new programmes on account of Associate Degrees

The number of new programmes assessed (first applications) totalled 94 in 2018 (versus 72 in 2017). This increase can mainly be attributed to the applications regarding new Associate Degree programmes and the doubling in decisions after three years following an assessment of satisfaction of conditions.

New programmes accounted for a success rate of 63 per cent in 2018. The success rates thus appear to stabilise at a slightly higher level (compared to its 55 per cent of several years in a row). Last year, 15 of the 94 new applications for initial accreditation were withdrawn, 2 failed the assessment, and 18 applications resulted in the imposition of conditions. In this respect, once more, hardly any difference can be observed between the government-funded sector and the privately funded sector; the trend that set in during 2017 thus continues. Previously, success rates fluctuated, whilst those in privately funded education were markedly lower than those in government-funded education.

Table 4: Initial accreditations in the Netherlands (first applications – excluding decisions following assessment of satisfaction of conditions / after three years)

Academic higher education	2017	2018
Positive	18	16
Application withdrawn	4	2
Conditions	9	3
Academic higher education overall	31	21
Associate Degrees		
Positive	8	22
Application withdrawn		4
Conditions	5	8
Associate Degrees overall	13	34
Professional higher education		
Positive	21	21
Application withdrawn	3	9
Negative		2
Conditions	4	7
Professional higher education overall	28	39

Other applications

In 2018, the following other applications were processed in the Netherlands:

- 5 applications within the context of the procedure for acknowledgement as a recognised private institution. Conditions were imposed in two cases; the other three applications either resulted in a negative decision or were withdrawn;
- 375 applications for approval regarding a proposed panel composition;
- 4 applications within the context of the learning outcomes experiment;
- 52 applications for a change of name;
- 12 applications for distinctive features (6 pertaining to Sustainability; 2 to Internationalisation; 2 to Small-scale and Intensive Education; 1 to certification of Honours programmes; and 1 to Evidence-based Practice).

Other activities

Learning outcomes experiment

In the spring of 2018, NVAO processed the final applications from programmes regarding admission to the learning outcomes experiment: four applications from a single university of applied sciences, involving programmes that each submitted its own educational concept for assessment. Monitoring constituted the common thread in 2018: the monitoring interviews conducted by the Learning Outcomes Experiment Project Group (comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Education Inspectorate; and NVAO) with participating universities of applied sciences regarding the progress in the implementation of the educational concept. The project group visited ten such universities. The experiment will run until 2021.

In September, NVAO organised an information meeting for the programmes that had commenced in September 2016, in preparation for the accreditation assessment of the

modes of study concerned. In the current phase of the experiment, NVAO assesses the quality actually achieved by the experimenting programmes.

The learning outcomes experiment generates a great deal of energy within the universities of applied sciences. The potential offered by the new approach is kindling considerable enthusiasm. At the same time, it is clear that both students and teachers still fail to make the most of the options offered by the concept.

2018 Framework

In 2018, the NVAO Netherlands Department developed the Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2018, with a view to the introduction of the Customised Accreditation Act on 1 February 2019 (a transitional arrangement has been in place since 20 November 2018). From that date on, the 2018 Framework will replace the 2016 Framework. The 2018 Framework comprises the recommendations of the Education Inspectorate with respect to the operation of the accreditation system in the Netherlands.

The upgrade of the framework afforded NVAO the opportunity to embark on a thorough optimisation of its internal working processes and on the further digitalisation of its activities. To this end, additional staff have been deployed on a temporary basis. The efforts will continue in 2019.

The new Act has also generated a new responsibility for NVAO. NVAO is tasked with verifying whether all the panel secretaries meet the requirements as regards independence and competence, and with registering their compliance. In order to ensure compliance with the competence requirements, NVAO organises training sessions and structural refresher meetings. An entirely new procedure has been developed in-house for monitoring the qualifications of the panel secretaries and for publishing registrations on the NVAO website.

Quality Agreements

In April 2018, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science reached consensus with the education sector regarding the substantiation of the Higher Education Quality Agreements 2019-2024, and commissioned the NVAO Netherlands Department to subject the plans of the institutions to an independent assessment. To this end, NVAO has developed the Protocol for the Assessment of Quality Agreements 2019-2024, which addresses three review stages: 1) in 2019, assessment of the plans submitted by the institutions regarding the allocation of the study advance resources; 2) in 2022, assessment of the realisation of the plans; and 3) from 2023 on, evaluation of the realisation of the plans.

The past year, NVAO commenced the preparations for the round of assessments. To this end, a project plan including a budget was developed in 2018, on the basis of which the preparations were launched and an assessment framework was drawn up.

Additional, temporary staff have been appointed to assist in the preparations and implementation.

The first institutional plan was assessed at the end of 2018. NVAO will be visiting a total of 54 higher education institutions to review their plans for the allocation of the study advance measures.

Many institutions are combining the assessment of the Quality Agreements with the second round of institutional audits, which commenced at the end of 2017. In the first phase of the Quality Agreements, the plans must set out how the institutions intend to spend the funds in relation to the six themes set down in the sector agreements. After the assessment, by no

later than 1 April 2020, NVAO will advise the Minister of Education, Culture and Science regarding the institutional plans. The Minister bears responsibility for a final decision and the allocation of the study advance resources.

Training schools

In 2018, the NVAO Netherlands Department, as requested by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, embarked on the preparations for the initial accreditation of prospective training schools. In the first half of 2019, 18 organisations will be subjected to such an assessment.

International activities

Assessment in Luxembourg

At the request of the Luxembourg Ministry of Higher Education, the NVAO Flanders Department has conducted an institutional assessment plus four programme assessments at the Institut Supérieur de l'Économie-Hochschule der Wirtschaft (ISEC) in Luxembourg. On 25 June 2018, the Board of NVAO concluded that the institutional assessment and the programme assessments were conducted in accordance with the assessment frameworks agreed upon, and that the assessment process passed off correctly. The panel report has been submitted to the Luxembourg Education Ministry in the purview of setting down the accreditation decisions.

Danish interest in new Flemish system

The new Flemish quality assurance system has garnered attention abroad. The Danish accreditation organisation AKKR has invited an NVAO delegation to exchange views, as Denmark will embark on its second round of institutional accreditations in 2019. The foundations for the assessment of institutions will remain the same, yet Denmark is exploring potential improvements in its approach. The new Flemish quality assurance system is a source of inspiration in this respect.

WFME recognition

In November 2018, NVAO was the first EQAR registered quality assurance agency in the European Union to be recognised for a ten-year term by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). This recognition attests to its satisfaction of the new Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) requirements pertaining to foreign agencies assessing Doctor of Medicine programmes. With effect from 2023, the United States will keep a closer watch on doctors who wish to specialise or work in one of the many American medical schools or hospitals. With respect to the Netherlands including Saba and Flanders, this entails that access to a postgraduate programme (following the United States Medical Licensing Examination - UCMLE) or work in the United States is exclusively reserved for Doctors of Medicine who have graduated from an NVAO accredited programme. This is the positive outcome of a project that was initiated in 2017, at the behest of the medical faculties. The advisory report by the WFME panel of external experts also carries a strong recommendation. Quality assurance of the internships is not explicitly addressed during the external assessments, whereas the WFME deems such to be necessary. Furthermore, the panel feels that the WFME criteria could be reflected more explicitly in the discipline-specific reference framework for medical programmes. NVAO has already invited the programmes to engage in a dialogue on this topic. Over the past period, its recognition by the WFME has resulted in several invitations to NVAO to share its experience in international forums.

Outgoing visits and presentations (selection)

- 8 February 2018 – meeting with QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) in Gloucester on “transnational education” (TNE)
- 28 February 2018 – participation in TNE conference in Vienna

- 14-15 March 2018 – workshop on internationalisation by two NVAO staff members, in Bregenz (Austria), for the International Bodensee Hochschule network
- 10 April 2018 and 8 June 2018: presentations by an NVAO staff member during the German DAAD conferences in Berlin and Kiev
- 24-27 April 2018 – participation by an NVAO staff member as an international panel member in the institutional assessment of the KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan
- 8-9 May 2018 – participation in a meeting of the Quality Audit Network (QAN)
- 13-14 June 2018 – visit by two NVAO staff members to Stockholm to discuss the new Swedish internationalisation strategy with Swedish universities and a ministerial committee
- 11-14 September 2018 – an NVAO staff member presented and chaired sessions on joint programmes and the quality of international partnerships during the EAIE conference in Geneva
- 20-21 September 2018 – presentation by an NVAO staff member during the Eurasian forum in Astana
- 24-25 October 2018 – NVAO presentations during the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degrees (EMJMDs) cluster meeting in Brussels
- 24-26 October 2018 - NVAO working visit to QQI in Ireland. The visit was intended to learn from one another, reinforce international connections, and share best practices.
- 7 November 2018 – presentation by an NVAO staff member during a conference on internationalisation in Uppsala
- 14-15 November 2018 – an NVAO staff member was invited by QAA Scotland to participate in the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) training
- 15 November 2018 – special EQAF session on Quality in Cross-Border Higher Education in Vienna

Collaboration with stakeholders

NVAO periodically consults with the Flemish and Dutch Ministers of Education. Twice a year, the NVAO Executive Board participates in the consultation held between the two Ministers (Committee of Ministers). Official consultations are also held with the Dutch and Flemish Ministries of Education.

Within the Sounding Board consultative body, NVAO Flanders Department regularly confers with the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, the Cabinet of the Flemish Minister of Education, the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), the Council of Flemish University Colleges (VLHORA), and the student organisation VVS (National Union of Students in Flanders) about the development of the Flemish quality assurance system and other issues.

The Flanders Department is an observer in the Learning Outcomes Steering Committee of the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR). With the Flemish VLUHR-KZ quality assessment agency, the Flanders Department periodically discusses the performance of assessment procedures. The Flanders Department also collaborates with the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR); the Council of Flemish University Colleges (VLHORA); the Flemish National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC Vlaanderen); the Flemish Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances (AHOVOKS); and the Flemish Education Council (VLOR).

The NVAO Netherlands Department maintains contact at various levels with the Dutch umbrella organisations: the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU); the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH); the Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions (NRTO); the Education Inspectorate; the Education Council; the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (Nuffic); the Information Centre for Degree Accreditation (IDW); the Dutch National Students Association (ISO); and the Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb).

In the purview of periodic consultations with the various stakeholders, the Netherlands Department has set up a stakeholders' consultative body. The Netherlands Department regularly confers with the Education Inspectorate and the assessment agencies AeQui, Certiked, Hobéon Certificering bv, MusiQuE Quality Enhancement, Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA), and Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) regarding the implementation of the system and the assessment procedures. Finally, the Netherlands Department confers with the Committee for Effective Higher Education (CDHO) and the Education Inspectorate regarding the exchange of data.

NVAO Organisation

Board and management

The Dutch and Flemish members of the NVAO Board are experts in the fields of higher education, the professional practice of higher education, scientific or academic research, or quality assurance. The NVAO Board consists of a maximum of fifteen members, who are appointed for a four-year term by the Committee of Ministers (the Dutch and Flemish Ministers responsible for higher education). The Board of NVAO focuses on the strategic policy pursued by the organisation. The Chair and a maximum of four other members of the Board constitute the NVAO Executive Board. The Board of NVAO has mandated the Executive Board – and, with respect to the Netherlands, also the Management Team – to decide on specific applications. The Board of NVAO met five times in 2018. The Executive Board sat on a weekly basis. In the year under review, the Board also organised meetings with members of the Management Team on strategic policy issues.

At the end of his second term of office, Mr Paul van Roon resigned from the Board of NVAO with effect from 1 December 2018. Ms Simone Buitendijk resigned as from 1 January 2019. NVAO thanks them for their valuable input over the past years.

Composition of the Board of NVAO (with effect from 31 December 2018)

Dr A.H. (Anne) Flierman (Chair, the Netherlands)
Lic. A. (Ann) Verreth (Vice-Chair, Flanders)
Em. Prof. Dr L. (Ludo) Beheydt (Flanders)
Prof. S.E. (Simone) Buitendijk, MD, MPH, PhD (the Netherlands)
R. (Rudi) D'Hauwers (Flanders)
Lic. M. (Mia) De Schampheleere (Flanders)
Dr M.J.J. (Marc) Luwel (Flanders)
Lic. B. (Bart) Maes (Flanders)
T. (Truus) Omta (the Netherlands)
J.A. (Jet) Rip MSc (the Netherlands)
M.A. (Michael) van Straalen (the Netherlands)
Drs J. (Jasper) Tuijtel (the Netherlands)
Dr L. (Lieteke) van Vucht Tijssen (the Netherlands)
Drs R.P. (Paul) Zevenbergen (the Netherlands)

Composition of NVAO Executive Board (with effect from 31 December 2018)

Dr A.H. (Anne) Flierman (Chair)
Lic. A. (Ann) Verreth (Vice-Chair)
Dr M.J.J. (Marc) Luwel
Drs R.P. (Paul) Zevenbergen

Composition of Management Team (with effect from 31 December 2018)

Mr L. (Luit) Kroes (Chair; Director, Netherlands Department)
Lic. A. (Axel) Aerden (Director, Flanders Department)
Drs R. (René) Hageman (Department Head, the Netherlands)
Drs U. (Ursula) Tielak QC (controller)

Office

Filing and computerisation

In the autumn of 2018, the Filing Department initiated the Digital Records project, for which additional external filing experts have been hired. This project is essential in order to meet the requirements stipulated by the Public Records Act and also to simplify the application procedure for institutions. Additional staff were deployed to several processes within the Support Department in 2018, in the purview of improvement and optimisation. One such process involved IT, in which the focus was on improved project control and the completion of long-term projects.

In Flanders, the year under review saw the introduction of the new Higher Education Register, which was developed in collaboration with the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. The new register enables automatic data exchange with internal NVAO systems. In the Netherlands, the internal workflow system and several decisions were adapted to the Customised Accreditation Act and the new Dutch assessment framework in 2018. NVAO staff are collaborating with the Dutch governmental implementation agency for the education sector in Groningen (DUO) on the exchange of Dutch data for the Central Register of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO).

A panel portal is being developed which will simplify the composition of panels for programmes and institutions, and provide greater transparency.

Communication

The year 2018 saw great strides in terms of communication. In the first six months, a new corporate identity was introduced, in close consultation with a staff and stakeholders feedback group. During and after the summer, a new website was developed on the basis of a comprehensive survey among nearly 2000 stakeholders. The new website, to be launched in early 2019, will set out the range of Flemish and Dutch accreditation procedures in clear step by step plans. It will also explain the Flemish and Dutch quality assurance systems, and encompass separate information pages for students and panel members. The Dutch procedures have been adapted to the Customised Accreditation Act and the new assessment framework (2018 Framework). In the year 2019, the website will be developed further to enable online submission of applications.

In the year under review, the Flemish and Dutch NVAO departments also organised, in collaboration with the Communications department, SAMENaries and information meetings for quality assurance staff of institutions, panel members, and quality assessment agencies, focused on the new Flemish system, the Dutch Customised Accreditation Act, the 2018 Framework, and the next round of assessments at Dutch universities within the context of the Quality Agreements. In addition, an aQademy was organised in Antwerp on e-learning. In The Hague, the annual Meet&Greet featured keynote speaker Peter Vandermeersch, former editor in chief of the Dutch *NRC Handelsblad* daily paper.

HR

The departure of the HR staff member in 2018 was one of the reasons for a reorganisation of the HR department. Staff deployment for this department was finalised in the autumn; a coordinator/consultant and a staff member were recruited. Important and labour-intensive projects for the HR department are the introduction of the national job classification system and the implementation of the Dutch Act regulating the legal position of government officials.

In the year under review, NVAO staff accounted for 49.1 FTEs (2017: 49.5 FTEs) (see Table 5). Two Dutch policy assistants and one Flemish policy assistant have been recruited to replace departing staff and in order to accommodate the workload. Furthermore, Flemish and Dutch student panel members have been recruited, in particular, from the arts sector. Throughout the year, a small group of regular temporary and stand-by workers has been called upon as backup for absent staff in the operations, catering/logistics, and IT departments. The workload entailed by the processing of all the applications and other projects related to the Flemish and Dutch systems is and will remain high.

Table 5: NVAO FTEs per position, as of 31 December (excluding Board/temps)

	2017	2018
Policy advisors	21.7	18.01
Internationalisation	2.0	2.11
Support and Operations	17.9	20.93
Management and Directors	4.1	4.22
Board	3.8	3.83
Total staff in FTEs	49.5	49.1

The NVAO building in The Hague is also home to the Committee for Effective Higher Education (CDHO) and the Committee for Macro Efficiency in Vocational Training (CMMBO). These committees operate independently, but NVAO bears responsibility for the logistics, facilities, and staffing of the committees. The past year, a legal advisor for the CDHO committee was recruited to replace a retiring staff member (see Table 6). The CMMBO committee hired a new secretarial employee to replace a departing staff member.

Table 6: CDHO and CMMBO FTEs, as of 31 December

	2017	2018
CDHO	4.7	4.7
CMMBO	2.3	2.3
Total staff in FTEs	6.8	6.8

