

NVAO • FLANDERS

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FLANDERS 2025-2031

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2025



NVAO • FLANDERS

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FLANDERS 2025-2031

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2025

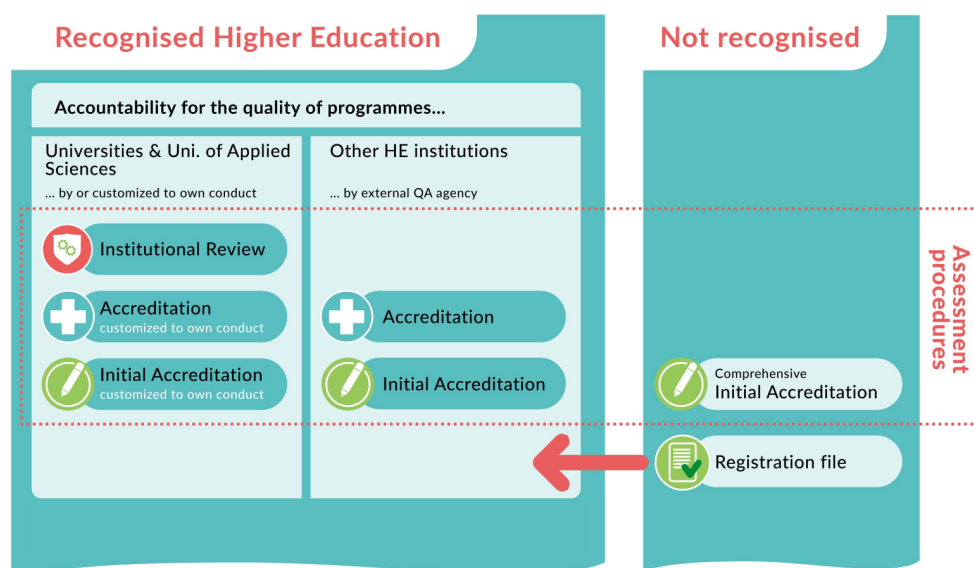
This assessment framework applies to universities and universities of applied sciences in Flanders, with the exception of institutions whose teaching authorisation is limited to one field of study.

Table of Contents

Overview of the quality assurance system for 2019-2025.....	8
1 Introduction	10
2 Assessment philosophy.....	12
2.1 Operationalisation of the involvement of external, independent experts.....	12
2.2 NVAO's Appreciative Approach	12
3 Assessment procedure.....	14
3.1 Assessment ground	14
3.2 Assessment scale and assessment rule	15
4 Assessment procedure.....	17
4.1 Preliminary consultations	17
4.2 Critical Reflection.....	17
4.3 Application.....	18
4.4 Admissibility.....	18
4.5 Payment for the procedure	18
4.6 Composition of the panel	18
4.7 Planning of the dialogue with the institution	19
4.8 Exploratory dialogue (optional)	20
4.9 Supplement to the Critical Reflection (optional)	21
4.10 In-depth dialogue	21
4.11 Assessment and assessment report	22
4.12 Decision-making NVAO.....	23
4.13 Internal and external appeals	24
4.14 Publication	24
5 Assessment procedure following a positive institutional review decision with limited validity.....	25
5.1 Coordination of the assessment procedure	25
5.2 Preliminary consultations	25
5.3 Critical Reflection.....	25
5.4 Application.....	26
5.5 Admissibility.....	26
5.6 Payment for the procedure	26
5.7 Composition of the panel	26
5.8 Planning of the dialogue with the institution	26
5.9 Exploratory dialogue (optional)	26
5.10 Supplement to the Critical Reflection (optional)	27
5.11 In-depth dialogue	27
5.12 Assessment and assessment report	27
5.13 Decision-making NVAO.....	27
5.14 Internal and external appeals	27
5.15 Publication	27

Overview of the quality assurance system for 2019-2025

The Quality Assurance System – Flanders 2025-2031 focuses on the quality of individual programmes and its accountability. This is achieved cyclically either through the institutional review, which enables universities and universities of applied sciences to account for the quality of their programmes themselves, or through accreditation, which establishes the achieved quality of a programme. External, independent experts (peers) are engaged in each assessment of educational quality, either by the institution itself or through a panel convened by NVAO or by an external evaluation body.



Recognised higher education

Universities and universities of applied sciences

Universities and universities of applied sciences are solely responsible for confirming the quality of their programmes. They give account to society by publishing information on the quality of each accredited programme on their website. The institutional review assesses the manner in which a university or university of applied sciences pursues its educational policy. Within its educational policy, each institution includes a conduct for confirming the quality of its programmes. This responsibility for confirming the quality of programmes applies to accredited programmes. For this reason, each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an initial accreditation, a procedure in which an external panel assesses the potential quality of the programme.

Following recognition as a new programme, the programme is also subjected to a first programme accreditation: the official decision by NVAO that the programme meets pre-determined minimum quality and level requirements. Following the first programme accreditation (with a positive outcome), responsibility for confirming the quality of the programme is vested with the universities and universities of applied sciences themselves. Should an institutional review show a university's or university of applied sciences' inability to confirm the quality of its accredited programmes, NVAO will regain this responsibility. The confirmation of quality will then be carried out by NVAO on a programme-by-programme basis.

The initial accreditation and programme accreditation procedures are designed to optimally complement the conduct that the institution has in place for confirming the quality of its other programmes. We here refer to conduct-tailored procedures.

Other institutions

All the other recognised higher education institutions give account of the quality of their programmes through the involvement of an external evaluation body. An external evaluation body is a quality assurance agency either registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, www.eqar.eu) or recognised by NVAO on the basis of a collaboration agreement warranting that the external assessment is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015). The latter applies to external evaluation bodies that also perform quality assurance activities outside the European Higher Education Area.

Each new programme to be launched is subjected to an initial accreditation coordinated by NVAO and subsequently to periodic programme accreditations.

Non-recognised higher education

Non-recognised education providers may be registered by the Flemish Government as providers of recognised higher education. This is based on a registration file, supplemented by a positive NVAO decision regarding the (potential) quality of the education they provide following an NVAO-coordinated comprehensive initial accreditation of at least one of their programmes.

1 Introduction

The institutional review assesses whether a higher education institution pursues its educational policy in a qualitative manner, including the conduct for confirming the quality of its programmes.

NVAO appoints a review panel of external, independent experts to carry out this assessment. The assessment comprises an examination of the link between the educational policy and the educational vision of the institution and the societal challenges that it faces in its own context. In this way, the panel examines how the institution ensures that the educational policy is effective, in other words, how the institution works towards the set goals.

The panel also examines whether and how the institution confirms the quality of the individual programmes through its own conduct, which is part of the educational policy. The panel also examines how the institution ensures the involvement of internal and external stakeholders on the one hand and external, independent experts on the other hand.

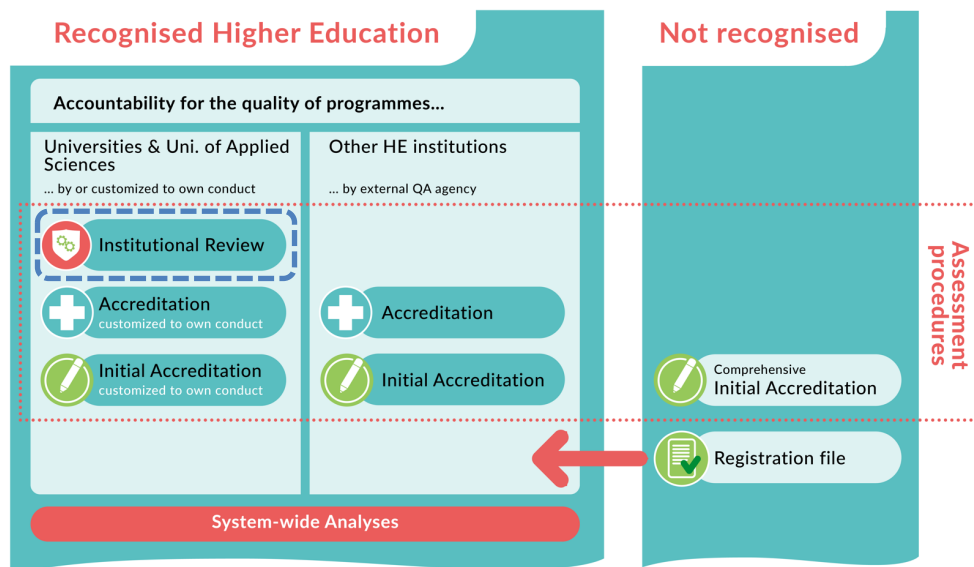
In this assessment, the panel also takes into account the institution's policy processes to support the education that it offers in its programmes in accordance with its missions in the field of research and social and scientific services.

In all aspects of the institutional review, specific attention is paid to the quality culture within the institution.

The institutional review is mandatory for universities and universities of applied sciences, with the exception of institutions whose teaching authorisation is limited to one field of study, and is conducted every six years. A positive outcome means that the institution has demonstrated that it confirms the quality of its own programmes in an internationally accepted manner (in accordance with the ESG, 2015). A positive outcome therefore results in the extension of the accreditation periods for the institution's programmes that have previously completed a full accreditation period.

The position of the assessment procedure presented here within the Flemish Quality Assurance System.

The present assessment framework comprises four parts: 1) the assessment philosophy, 2) the assessment principle with the assessment ground and assessment scale and assessment rules, 3) the assessment procedure coordinated by NVAO, and 4) the assessment procedure coordinated by NVAO following a positive institutional review decision with limited validity.



The position of the presented assessment procedure within the Flemish Quality Assurance System.

2 Assessment philosophy

The institutional review is an assessment process that results in an institutional review decision by NVAO. This decision-making takes place on the basis of the assessment principle after completion of an NVAO-coordinated assessment procedure. The assessment process is conducted in accordance with the assessment philosophy, which is founded on a specific operationalisation of the involvement of external, independent experts and on NVAO's Appreciative Approach.

2.1 Operationalisation of the involvement of external, independent experts

Within the Flemish quality assurance system, peer review conducted in an internationally accepted manner is central. To this end, NVAO organises a dialogue between a panel of external, independent experts and the institution being assessed. In doing so, the panel combines a number of forms of expertise that NVAO considers necessary in order to conduct an authoritative assessment. In the case of the institutional review, these comprise at least educational expertise, evaluation expertise, familiarity with policy and evaluation processes through a leading position in an organisation outside higher education, managerial expertise, international expertise and student-related expertise. In addition, the panel commands thorough knowledge of higher education in Flanders. These forms of expertise are specified in the present assessment framework.

The external experts must also be independent. This means, among other things, that they may not have any interest, either positive or negative, in the outcome and consequences of the assessment, and that over the five years prior to the appointment of the panel they must not have had any connections or ties with the institution. To this end, NVAO's panel members sign a code of deontology in which the incompatibilities for participation in a panel are clearly specified and listed. The code of deontology is published on the NVAO website.

In the assessments that institutions organise themselves within the framework of their own conduct, they also involve external, independent experts. During the institutional review, the review panel assesses the substantiation and operationalisation of this involvement.

2.2 NVAO's Appreciative Approach

The quality assurance system is based on trust in the existing quality of higher education and vests a large measure of responsibility with the institution. The chosen educational policy and the context of the institution are leading in the assessment. In the institutional review, the panel bases its assessment on the context of the institution and examines the educational policy from the perspective of the board of the institution. The institution has its own vision of education and its quality and makes its own choices in rolling out its educational policy. The panel examines whether this educational policy is being implemented successfully. In this way, NVAO recognises the responsibility that institutions assume with regard to the development of their educational policy and their quality assurance at programme level.

In order to have the above basic philosophy reflected in the assessment process, the panel adopts NVAO's Appreciative Approach. Rather than a quality assurance model, this Appreciative Approach constitutes a philosophy, a mind-set, a style or an attitude that is leading throughout the entire assessment process and in the design of all its components. Through NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the focus is placed on "what" is and "what" is possible within the applicable context, without focusing on what should be or substantiating the "how". The latter always falls under the autonomy of the institution. NVAO's Appreciative Approach always leaves room for in-depth, critical investigation. In the light of NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the institution itself further substantiates the assessment framework wherever possible and necessary.

An open dialogue is a key element of the assessment process. Within the assessment, special attention is paid to what is going well, with an emphasis on the embedding and fostering of successful processes.

Nonetheless, the panel brings out and critically examines any lack of clarity or points for attention in the rollout of the policy, with the aim of offering the institution opportunities to develop further or, where necessary, to improve. NVAO's Appreciative Approach therefore does not hinder critical investigation or critical judgement formation, but in doing so relies on dialogue and shared insights.

3 Assessment procedure

3.1 Assessment ground

The institutional review is designed on the basis of the following coherent questions:

- Is the educational policy of the institution in line with its educational vision and the societal challenges facing the institution?
- Does the institution ensure that the educational policy works towards the set goals?
- Within this policy, is the quality of each accredited programme confirmed in an internationally accepted manner?
- Does the institution demonstrate a quality culture at all levels?

These questions determine the scope of the assessment conducted for the purpose of the review.

The institution is autonomously responsible for its vision of higher education and the quality of it. Based on this, it develops its educational policy. The panel examines whether the policy is in line with the educational vision and the societal challenges that the institution faces within the context in which it operates. The institution itself determines which choices it makes to respond to that context. Substantive choices naturally align with the way in which the institution presents itself.

The institutional review examines how the institution rolls out its educational policy and monitors that work is being undertaken at all levels towards the set goals.

The quality culture present within the institution receives special attention in all aspects of the institutional review. In this context, a quality culture is an organisational culture in which all stakeholders naturally strive for continuous quality monitoring and enhancement.

Confirming programme quality means that the board of the institution demonstrates the quality of the programme, either at regular intervals or continuously, by:

- testing its operation through quality assurance activities;
- validly documenting findings, including strengths and points for attention;
- ensuring that points for attention are addressed, both reactively for the specific case and proactively for similar future situations;
- reporting cyclically and per programme on the findings and their follow-up;
- formally establishing and assuming responsibility for quality by the board of the institution in order to demonstrate, internally and externally, that the delivered quality meets the requirements, hereinafter referred to as the confirmation decision.

This means that the institution has in place a conduct and involves internal and external stakeholders as well as external, independent experts at programme level. Conduct is understood as the entirety of actions, processes, practices, procedures and instruments that enable the institution to confirm the quality of its programmes. In this regard, the institution ensures the input and involvement of at least teaching staff and students or student representatives as internal stakeholders. To this end, the institution also explicates and substantiates the way in which it gives substance to external independence, the involvement of experts, including in any event subject expertise, educational expertise, professional-field expertise and student-related expertise, and the procedures it establishes to operationalise this involvement. The conduct also monitors that the programme complies with the relevant regulations governing access to certain offices or professions, and the institution includes this in its confirmation decisions where applicable.

The conduct, with the involvement of internal and external stakeholders and external, independent experts, results in formal results and outcomes at programme level. These results and outcomes provide

insight into both strengths and points for attention and form the basis for a confirmation decision. By means of this decision, the board of the institution formally establishes the quality and demonstrates, both internally and externally, whether the delivered quality meets the requirements. The strengths and points for attention established by the board of the institution in the confirmation decision form the basis for the public information on the quality of the programme. This public information is up to date, traceable and valid, and is embedded in the operation of the conduct.

For every programme whose quality meets the requirements, the manifestation of all of the following quality features is confirmed:

1. The programme's learning outcomes constitute a clear and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content and orientation;
2. The programme's curriculum ties in with the most recent developments in the discipline, takes account of developments in the professional field and is relevant to society;
3. The teaching staff allocated to the programme provide students with optimum opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes;
4. The programme offers students adequate and easily accessible facilities and counselling;
5. The teaching and learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the learning process and contributes to smooth study progress;
6. The assessment of students reflects the learning process and concretises the intended learning outcomes;
7. The programme provides complete and easily readable information on all phases of the study career;
8. Information on the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.

The quality of programmes is confirmed in an internationally accepted manner. This means that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) are followed. The quality features are a translation of the elements from the ESG that characterise high-quality higher education programmes. However, the quality features are not separate standards that must each lead to a separate judgement. They serve as a guideline, on the one hand for institutions in building and developing their conduct and, on the other hand, for the panel in evaluating that conduct as part of the educational policy. The panel examines how the quality features are integrated within the institution's own conduct, whether or not in the same form. It is expressly not the intention that the review panel itself assesses programmes on the basis of these features.

3.2 Assessment scale and assessment rule

Assessment scale

The institutional review prompts one of the following three decisions:

- positive institutional review decision;
- negative institutional review decision;
- positive institutional review decision with limited validity.

Assessment rule for the institutional review decision

The institution is assessed on the basis of the assessment ground as a whole, whereby the coherent questions are not weighed separately. The decision follows from a holistic and substantiated judgement based on the findings. If it is established that the institution is not capable of confirming the quality of its accredited programmes in an internationally accepted manner, a negative decision will always follow. Based on the underlying philosophy of the quality assurance system, the assessment assumes that the institution meets the assessment ground. The contrary must be substantiated in detail.

Positive institutional review decision

The institution demonstrates that it implements its educational policy in a qualitative manner and demonstrates a tangible quality culture at all levels. It has developed an educational policy that is in line with its educational vision and the societal challenges and that works towards the set goals. As part of its educational policy, the institution has in place a conduct through which the quality of each accredited programme is confirmed in an internationally accepted manner.

Recommendations are not at odds with a positive institutional review decision. The positive institutional review decision is valid for six years.

Negative institutional review decision

The institution is not capable of confirming the quality of each accredited programme in an internationally accepted manner. The negative institutional review decision is valid for six years.

Positive institutional review decision with limited validity

In all other cases, a positive decision with limited validity is taken. This means that conditions are defined which specify what the institution must realise in order to retain a positive institutional review decision after the period of limited validity has expired. In addition to conditions, recommendations may also be formulated.

The period of limited validity is determined in consultation with the institution and takes account of the timeframe within which the institution can meet the conditions. The maximum duration is three years and results, no later than three months before that period expires, in a new institutional review decision based on a new limited institutional review confined to the elements to which the conditions relate. The new institutional review decision is positive or negative.

Assessment rule for the institutional review decision after limited validity

The institution is assessed on the basis of the conditions imposed on it in the framework of a positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The decision follows from a holistic and substantiated judgement based on the findings.

Positive institutional review decision

The institution demonstrates that it has met the conditions imposed on it in the framework of a positive institutional review decision with limited validity. Recommendations are not at odds with a positive institutional review decision. The positive institutional review decision is valid for six years, reduced by the duration of the period of limited validity.

Negative institutional review decision

The institution has not met the conditions imposed on it in the framework of a positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The negative institutional review decision is valid for six years.

4 Assessment procedure

In line with NVAO's Appreciative Approach, all steps in the assessment process are designed appreciatively, from the training of panel members, through the panel's assessment, to the final reporting.

4.1 Preliminary consultations

In the run-up to the formal application, the institution may hold preliminary consultations with NVAO no later than three months before the fixed submission date of the application file, in order to agree on the following aspects:

- Timing and steps in the procedure, including the planning of the dialogue between the panel and the institution;
- The panel profile and the combination of expertise;
- The drafting of the Critical Reflection.

4.2 Critical Reflection

The institution draws up a Critical Reflection that serves a dual purpose:

- Reflecting on its own educational policy, while ensuring that this reflection is broadly supported within the institution;
- Providing the panel with insight into the institution's educational policy, the context in which the institution rolls out its educational policy and the choices made in this regard, the state of affairs with regard to the implementation of the educational policy, and the strengths and points for attention that emerge from this.
-

In order to achieve this dual purpose, the Critical Reflection includes:

- Documentation that provides the panel with insight into the educational vision, the educational policy and the organisational structure of the institution, and the way in which policy is implemented, evaluated and adjusted. In addition, the documentation includes the conduct for confirming the quality of programmes and the way in which internal and external stakeholders and experts are involved. Reference is made to the public information that results from the analysis of the results and outcomes of the conduct. The institution also illustrates the existing quality culture. This documentation enables the panel to conduct an assessment of the answers to the four coherent questions. The specific format and content of the documentation are not prescribed and fall within the autonomy of the institution. Information that is publicly available on the website may be provided via a web link;
- A contextualisation in which the institution clarifies the reasoning behind its own policy and the substantive choices that have been made. The panel does not elaborate on this in its assessment. It adopts this perspective of the institution in its entirety;
- An appreciation of the educational policy in which the institution reflects on its own performance on the basis of the four coherent questions from the assessment ground. During its assessment, the panel does the same, and the insights from both sides are brought together in dialogue in order to arrive at a state of affairs with regard to the qualitative implementation of the educational policy;
- The lessons learned from this own appreciation, with the identification of strengths and points for attention.

In essence, the Critical Reflection answers the question as to how the institution monitors the quality of its education within the relevant societal and international context and how it involves its stakeholders and external, independent experts in this process. The institution refers in this regard to verifiable facts

and underlying documents and provides striking examples. The Critical Reflection is a self-contained document that can be read independently.

The Critical Reflection comprises a maximum of 25,000 words, excluding any attachments, which are kept to a minimum. It may suffice to shape it as a reading guide for publicly available information, supplemented with a brief reflection on the implementation of the educational policy with a list of lessons learned.

4.3 Application

The institution submits the application file no later than twelve months before the end of the validity period of the current institutional review decision. Two or more universities or two or more universities of applied sciences may jointly submit a file for an institutional review. In that case, they are subjected to the same institutional review, which results in one joint assessment report and one joint decision.

As a procedural requirement, the application must be submitted electronically via the procedural webpage, or in an emergency by email via aanvraag@nvao.org, and must consist of an application letter signed by the board of the institution and the Critical Reflection of the institution, as described under 4.2. If a panel member so requests, the institution sends a paper version to that panel member.

4.4 Admissibility

NVAO checks the admissibility of the application in order to verify whether the procedural requirement has been met. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a timeframe of 15 calendar days. Subsequently, the institution must complete the application in consultation with the process coordinator.

4.5 Payment for the procedure

Once the application has been found admissible, the institution will receive a request for full payment of the cost of the institutional review. The rate applicable to this procedure is fixed by the Flemish Minister of Education. The costs entailed in the work performed by the panel, such as remuneration, travel expenses and overnight accommodation, are paid by NVAO from this amount.

4.6 Composition of the panel

A panel consists of a number of experts who are in a position to make a judgement on the present state of affairs within an institution regarding the qualitative implementation of the educational policy, including the confirmation of programme quality.

In order to be able to take the context of the institution into account, NVAO always takes the initiative to involve the institution in the composition of the panel.

A panel comprises a minimum of five members, including a student, and is supported by a secretary and an NVAO process coordinator. The secretary and the process coordinator do not sit on the panel.

In order to warrant an objective and fair assessment, the panel must be able to work independently from the institution. All panel members, the secretary and the process coordinator sign a code of deontology to this end.

The panel must be authoritative. To this end, it combines the following forms of expertise:

- In order to take maximum account of the specific context of an institution and to survey the broader framework within which an institution operates, the panel commands thorough knowledge of higher education in Flanders;

- International expertise is intended to enable the panel to step outside the Flemish frame of reference and to verify whether the qualitative implementation of the educational policy meets what is common internationally within higher education; in order to achieve this at the level of an institution, employment in higher education outside Flanders is required;
- Educational expertise makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the educational policy of the institution and to assess whether the institution works towards the set goals;
- Evaluation expertise gives the panel the expertise required to assess whether the institution is capable of confirming the quality of education in its programmes by means of its educational policy and, more specifically, its conduct;
- One panel member is familiar with policy and evaluation processes through a leading position in an organisation outside higher education; this enables the panel to include in its assessment a frame of reference other than that of higher education;
- Managerial expertise allows the panel to verify whether the policy pursued has been developed with sufficient support and is being rolled out, monitored and adjusted;
- Student-related expertise enables the panel to verify whether a student-centred approach and students' interests are taken into account in such aspects as information provision for students, student facilities, counselling and student participation. Student experts preferably have experience as a student representative within a programme or institution.

Panel members are still active in their field of expertise, not necessarily in employment, at the time at which the panel is appointed. This also applies to the student on the panel.

NVAO informs the board of the institution of the panel composition. The institution has the right to submit substantiated objections to the composition of the panel within a timeframe of 15 calendar days. In addition, the institution is required to inform NVAO, within that same timeframe, of any information it has regarding the expertise and independence of panel members.

The process coordinator monitors the substantive philosophy of the quality assurance system and the methodology of the procedure and ensures that the panel conducts its assessment in that spirit and in accordance with NVAO's Appreciative Approach. To safeguard this, all panel members receive thorough training from NVAO prior to the procedure. This training prepares the panel members for their tasks and responsibilities and trains them in applying NVAO's Appreciative Approach. NVAO also provides the panel members with a manual on NVAO's Appreciative Approach. This manual can be consulted on the NVAO website.

4.7 Planning of the dialogue with the institution

As part of the panel's assessment, NVAO organises a dialogue between the panel and the institution. The format and planning of this dialogue are agreed upon in consultation with the institution and the panel. Within this dialogue, the institution may opt for an exploratory site visit in order to sharpen the panel's understanding of the institution and the context in which it operates. The panel will in any event conduct an in-depth site visit. The timing of a site visit is planned by NVAO in consultation with the institution. This takes account of periods during which the institution is closed, the presence of the institutional management and the availability of discussion partners.

During a site visit, it may be decided to work partly with online meetings, for example in order to speak with certain stakeholders for whom physical travel is difficult.

The panel prepares for the dialogue with the institution during one or more preliminary meetings. The content of the site visit programme is shaped through a co-creative process between the process coordinator, the institution and the panel chair. In the case of an exploratory site visit, the institution takes the first step in formulating a proposal. In the case of an in-depth site visit, this role is assigned to the panel. The final programme is determined by the panel.

The following discussion partners must definitely be involved across the interviews:

- Institutional management;
- Leadership responsible for education;
- Quality assurance experts and other relevant staff;
- Teaching staff from representative bodies;
- Students appointed by the student council;
- Representatives from the professional field.

At least one interview takes the form of a dialogue between the panel and students appointed by the student council. These students provide the substantive input for this interview.

In order to give all internal stakeholders of the institution the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the panel about the educational policy, including the conduct for confirming the quality of its programmes, the institution circulates an invitation for this purpose no later than four weeks before the in-depth site visit. The invitation contains a link to a digital form managed by NVAO. In this way, internal stakeholders can explain what they wish to discuss with the panel. It is for the panel to decide whether it considers the theme relevant to the assessment it is conducting and whether to invite the internal stakeholder concerned for an interview.

Considering that the panel may request additional information in the course of the dialogue, the programme features an open timeslot. This also enables the institution to submit additional documentation to the panel or to schedule additional interviews. The exchange of additional information during a site visit takes place by mutual agreement between the process coordinator, the panel and the institution and is always limited to the minimum necessary for the purpose of the panel's assessment.

4.8 Exploratory dialogue (optional)

In order to refine the image of the institution and the context in which it operates, the institution may allow the panel to conduct an exploratory site visit of a maximum of one day. It may also be decided to structure this dialogue, in whole or in part, through one or more online meetings.

The panel has at least six weeks to review the Critical Reflection and the documentation referred to therein. On this basis, the panel members individually draw up an initial appreciation of the institution. This appreciation is aimed at becoming acquainted with the educational policy of the institution and the choices that the institution has made in order to respond to the context in which it operates. The panel members explicitly state which strengths and focus points they recognize.

The institution draws up a programme in consultation with the process coordinator and the panel chair. On the basis of this programme, the institution can indicate the functions from which it proposes discussion partners. After reading the Critical Reflection, the panel indicates which topics it may wish to address additionally. The aim is to establish an open dialogue between the review panel and the institution. Based on NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the underlying philosophy is that the panel and the institution gain insight and are able to agree on the state of affairs within the institution.

In order to give the institution the opportunity to gain this insight, observers from the institution may be present during all interviews of the exploratory dialogue. An observer does not participate in the discussions but acts as the memory of the institution. If a staff member or student who acts as an observer will nevertheless participate in one or more interviews as a discussion partner, he or she may be replaced by another observer.

During its preliminary meeting, the panel brings together the individual initial appreciations and discusses which clarifying questions it wishes to ask the institution.

A site visit starts with a meet-and-greet for all those involved. The panel members and the discussion partners of the institution have the opportunity to get to know each other in an informal way. This moment breaks down barriers and therefore facilitates the subsequent dialogue. It also gives the panel the opportunity to form an impression of the informal quality culture.

There is a "feedback break" between the interviews. This moment gives both the panel and the institution the opportunity to share insights before the next interview starts. On the institution's side, the observers play an important role here; they ensure that the institution can keep track of the panel's insights.

The panel speaks with relevant discussion partners and, at the end of the exploratory dialogue, discusses the continuation of the procedure with the board of the institution. In particular, the panel makes a proposal for the assessment it wishes to conduct during the in-depth site visit in order to find answers to the coherent questions from the assessment ground.

4.9 Supplement to the Critical Reflection (optional)

At the latest 15 calendar days after the end of an exploratory dialogue and nine weeks prior to the in-depth site visit, the panel finalises its assessment proposal and delivers it to the institution. The institution then has a period of six weeks in which it may prepare a substantive supplement to the Critical Reflection. This is by no means an obligation. This supplement only addresses the panel's research questions and the review trails that the panel will carry out.

The institution consults with the panel on the content and timing of the submission of the supplement to the Critical Reflection. This supplement comprises a maximum of 5,000 words, excluding any attachments, which are kept to a minimum. The institution submits this supplement to NVAO no later than four weeks before the in-depth site visit.

4.10 In-depth dialogue

The in-depth dialogue always takes place via an in-depth site visit and is structured on the basis of a number of review trails that provide answers to the panel's research questions. If no exploratory dialogue has taken place, the panel has at least six weeks to review the Critical Reflection and the documentation referred to therein. The panel delivers its final assessment proposal to the institution no later than nine weeks before the in-depth site visit. Based on the Critical Reflection, or the supplement to the Critical Reflection, the panel formulates a second appreciation of the institution. This appreciation is aimed at identifying strengths of and points for attention regarding the educational policy and at elaborating on the panel's research questions.

The panel determines the duration of the in-depth site visit on the basis of the assessment it needs to conduct on site in order to arrive at an assessment advice. It may be decided to work partly with online meetings, for example in order to speak with certain stakeholders for whom physical travel is difficult. The in-depth site visit covers a maximum of three days. The panel substantiates the duration in its report. If no exploratory dialogue has taken place, the panel allows time to familiarise itself with the context of the institution.

In the run-up to the in-depth site visit, the institution receives:

- A list of functions from which discussion partners may be delegated;
- The additional documents that the panel may wish to see before or during the in-depth visit;
- A detailed programme drawn up by the panel in consultation with the institution and the process coordinator.

The way in which the site visit is structured is consistent with NVAO's Appreciative Approach. The aim is to establish an open dialogue between the review panel and the institution. Based on the Appreciative Approach, the underlying philosophy is that the panel and the institution gain insight in dialogue and are able to agree on the state of affairs within the institution.

In order to give the institution the opportunity to gain this insight, observers from the institution may be present during all interviews of the in-depth site visit. An observer does not participate in the discussions but acts as the memory of the institution. If a staff member or student who acts as an observer will nevertheless participate in one or more interviews as a discussion partner, he or she may be replaced by another observer.

During its preliminary meeting, the panel brings together the individual appreciations and discusses which questions it wishes to ask during the in-depth site visit.

If no exploratory site visit has taken place, the in-depth site visit starts with a meet-and-greet for all those involved. The panel members and the discussion partners of the institution have the opportunity to get to know each other in an informal way. This moment breaks down barriers and therefore facilitates the subsequent dialogue. It also gives the panel the opportunity to form an impression of the informal quality culture.

There is a "feedback break" between the interviews. This moment gives both the panel and the institution the opportunity to share insights before the next interview starts. On the institution's side, the observers play an important role here; they ensure that the institution can keep track of the panel's insights.

During the in-depth site visit, the panel speaks with relevant internal and external discussion partners and goes through the necessary documentation in order to answer its research questions. Furthermore, it pays special attention to the quality culture present in the institution and the support for the educational policy. The panel may always request to inspect additional information or speak with additional persons. At the end of each trail, it engages with those responsible within the institution in order to share and verify its findings.

At the end of the in-depth visit, the institution and the panel share the insights gained in broad outline in accordance with the philosophy of the Appreciative Approach. This closing session is an interactive reflection that allows the institution and the panel to develop shared insights into the status of the implementation of the educational policy and quality assurance within the institution.

If, during the assessment process, matters arise that could affect the independence of the assessment, stakeholders such as panel members, process coordinators, secretaries, staff of the institution or students may report such matters to NVAO via the complaints procedure available on the website.

4.11 Assessment and assessment report

The assessment conducted by the panel is structured by reference to the four coherent questions from the assessment ground. It should be noted in this respect that the questions need not be addressed separately during the assessment; however, the assessment report that sets out the findings of the panel must allow the reader to answer the questions.

During the dialogue with the institution and the preceding meeting of the panel, the secretary collects all input from the panel members and draws up a report that constitutes the basis for the assessment report. The assessment report is further supplemented as the panel's assessment progresses. The structure of the report is determined by the assessment that the panel will conduct.

Consequently, the report consists of a presentation of the assessment with factually substantiated findings, considerations and insights from the panel.

The report is primarily directed at the institution in order to return to it the story about its educational policy that has come about in dialogue with the panel. The report thus aims to create added value for the institution in the light of continuous quality enhancement. The report explicitly states what is going well in the institution and analyses the strengths and success factors. Opportunities and challenges are named, and points for attention and recommendations are substantiated.

In its assessment report, the panel advises NVAO on the institutional review decision to be taken. In its advice, it applies the assessment scale and assessment rules as set out in this framework after weighing positive and critical elements from the factually substantiated findings of the assessment it has conducted.

The assessment report comprises 25 to 30 pages and is preceded by a concise summary of the findings and the advice of the panel. The assessment report includes the following data:

- The full name of the institution or institutions subjected to the review;
- The location or locations of the institution or institutions concerned;
- The composition of the panel;
- The programme for the exploratory and in-depth dialogue with the institution;
- An overview of the material studied;
- A list of abbreviations.

The draft assessment report is shared with the panel members within four weeks after the in-depth site visit has been completed. The process coordinator assesses the internal consistency of the report and the traceability of the advice and, if necessary, proposes adjustments to the panel that clarify the findings or strengthen the substantiation of the advice. After all panel members have approved the contents of the assessment report, the chair of the panel endorses the report for the first time.

The report is then forwarded to the institution no later than three months before the decision deadline expires. The board of the institution is given 15 calendar days to point out factual inaccuracies and formulate technical remarks. Where necessary, the report is adjusted, after which the panel definitively endorses the assessment report. The panel is obliged to respond in writing to the board of the institution regarding any substantive factual inaccuracies that have been identified. The endorsed assessment report is submitted to NVAO.

4.12 Decision-making NVAO

NVAO will take an institutional review decision within a decision period of 12 months following receipt of the application and in accordance with the assessment scale and assessment rules set out in this framework. To this end, NVAO draws up a draft decision based on the panel's assessment report. When drawing up the draft decision, NVAO may ask the institution and/or the panel for additional information, explanations and clarifications. Ownership of the assessment report remains vested with the panel. NVAO may deviate from the advice contained in the assessment report in its draft decision, stating its reasons for doing so. All of this takes place in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Regulations on Administrative Principles applicable to decision-making by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders.

Before taking a positive institutional review decision with limited validity, NVAO organises a dialogue with the institution and, where applicable, the panel, in order to clarify what must be realised in order to meet the condition or conditions and within what timeframe this is achievable for the institution.

Each institution receives the approved draft decision and the underlying assessment report. After these have been sent, the board of the institution has 15 calendar days to lodge an internal appeal with NVAO. If no appeal is lodged within the stipulated timeframe, the decision is final.

The panel's assessment report is regarded as an integral part of the institutional review decision.

4.13 Internal and external appeals

Any draft decision or decision taken by NVAO is open to an internal appeal to NVAO and an external appeal to the Council of State, in accordance with NVAO's Regulations on Administrative Principles. NVAO provides the necessary information for this purpose on its website.

4.14 Publication

After the decision-making procedure, NVAO publishes the decision and the underlying assessment report on its website, in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), and forwards both documents to the Flemish Minister of Education.

5 Assessment procedure following a positive institutional review decision with limited validity

Following a positive institutional review decision with limited validity, NVAO organises a new limited institutional review. The new limited institutional review assesses whether the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity and, therefore, whether the institution has achieved what is required in order to retain a positive institutional review decision.

The assessment framework on the basis of which the institutional review decision with limited validity was taken applies to the new limited institutional review.

The procedure for a new limited institutional review allows for greater flexibility and is shaped according to what the institution must demonstrate in order to meet the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The new limited institutional review focuses exclusively on those elements of the procedure, as described in Chapter 4 of this assessment framework, that are relevant in order to demonstrate that the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity have been met. The details of this are determined in consultation between NVAO, the institution and, where necessary, the panel.

In line with NVAO's Appreciative Approach, all steps in the assessment process are designed appreciatively, from the training of panel members, through the panel's assessment, to the final reporting.

5.1 Coordination of the assessment procedure

No later than six months after the final positive institutional review decision with limited validity, NVAO organises a consultation with the institution and, where necessary, the panel in order to coordinate the following aspects:

- The conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity, and what the institution must achieve in order to retain a positive institutional review decision;
- Timing and steps in the assessment procedure following a positive institutional review decision with limited validity;
- Drafting and content of the Critical Reflection.

5.2 Preliminary consultations

In the run-up to the formal application, the institution may hold preliminary consultations with NVAO as formulated in Chapter 4.1 of this assessment framework.

5.3 Critical Reflection

In the case of a new limited institutional review, the Critical Reflection may be limited to the elements to which the conditions relate. In essence, the Critical Reflection answers the question as to how the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity.

The Critical Reflection further complies with the elements as formulated in Chapter 4.2 of this assessment framework.

5.4 Application

The application is submitted in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4.3 of this assessment framework.

5.5 Admissibility

NVAO deals with the admissibility of the application in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4.4 of this assessment framework.

5.6 Payment for the procedure

Payment of the cost of the assessment procedure is made in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4.5 of this assessment framework.

5.7 Composition of the panel

For a new limited institutional review, NVAO in principle reappoints the panel that issued the original advice that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The combination of expertise, the manner in which the panel is composed and its operation thereby meet the requirements as described in Chapter 4.6. Members who are no longer independent or who are no longer active in their field of expertise are replaced.

5.8 Planning of the dialogue with the institution

As part of the panel's assessment to answer the question as to how the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity, NVAO organises a dialogue between the panel and the institution. The format and planning of this dialogue are determined in accordance with Chapter 4.7 of this assessment framework.

Depending on the format of the panel's assessment, the following discussion partners may be involved:

- Institutional management;
- Leadership responsible for education;
- Quality assurance experts and other relevant staff;
- Teaching staff from representative bodies;
- Students appointed by the student council;
- Representatives from the professional field.

If the panel so wishes, it may ask the institution to circulate an invitation to enter into dialogue with the panel in accordance with Chapter 4.7 of this assessment framework.

5.9 Exploratory dialogue (optional)

In order to clarify developments and follow-up regarding the conditions since the positive institutional review decision with limited validity, the institution may allow the panel to conduct an exploratory site visit of a maximum of one day. It may also be decided to structure this dialogue, in whole or in part, through one or more online meetings. This exploratory dialogue contributes to the proposal for the assessment that the panel wishes to conduct during the in-depth site visit. With this proposal, the panel aims to indicate how it will examine the manner in which the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The exploratory dialogue is further designed in accordance with Chapter 4.8 of this assessment framework.

5.10 Supplement to the Critical Reflection (optional)

The finalisation of the definitive assessment proposal and the substantive supplement to the Critical Reflection take place in accordance with Chapter 4.9 of this assessment framework.

5.11 In-depth dialogue

The in-depth dialogue is designed in accordance with Chapter 4.10 of this assessment framework. The dialogue focuses on the assessment of whether the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity and, therefore, whether the institution has achieved what is required in order to retain a positive institutional review decision.

In the second appreciation, based on the Critical Reflection or the supplement to the Critical Reflection, the panel members explicitly state which strengths and focus points they recognise and, where necessary, refine the research questions. If no exploratory site visit has taken place, the in-depth site visit may start with a meet-and-greet in which all those involved can meet one another. The closing moment of the in-depth dialogue is an interactive reflection that enables the institution and the panel to build shared insights into how the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity.

5.12 Assessment and assessment report

The panel's assessment is shaped by reference to the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity. The assessment report that discusses the panel's findings allows the reader to answer the question as to whether the institution meets the conditions that gave rise to the positive institutional review decision with limited validity and, therefore, whether the institution has achieved what is required in order to retain a positive institutional review decision. The assessment report is endorsed and submitted to the institution in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4.11. The assessment report comprises a maximum of 30 pages.

5.13 Decision-making NVAO

Decision-making takes place in accordance with the provisions set out in Chapter 4.12 of this assessment framework. The new institutional review decision is either positive or negative.

5.14 Internal and external appeals

Any draft decision or decision taken by NVAO is open to an internal appeal to NVAO and an external appeal to the Council of State, in accordance with NVAO's Regulations on Administrative Principles. NVAO provides the necessary information for this purpose on its website.

5.15 Publication

After the decision-making procedure, NVAO publishes the decision and the underlying assessment report on its website, in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), and forwards both documents to the Flemish Minister of Education.

