

Distinctive feature of 'Small-scale and intensive education'

4 November 2011

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1 Introduction

For small-scale, intensive and residential programmes (hereinafter referred to as: small-scale and intensive), and for such courses of study that fall within a programme, under certain conditions the institution's board can select students and in combination with this impose tuition fees that are higher than those set down by law for standard programmes.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science must grant approval for this. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) advises the Minister on granting approval in accordance with Articles 6.7, 6.7a, 6.7b and 6.7c of the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW).

This framework sets out the requirements a programme must meet in order to qualify for a 'small-scale and intensive' distinctive feature. The requirements are drawn up in accordance with the principles set out for distinctive features in Chapter 7 of the Assessment Framework of the Higher Education Accreditation System.

The teaching in small-scale and intensive programmes is considerably more intensive than that in standard programmes. Education is intertwined with extra-curricular activities so that an academic and/or professional community is created in which students and staff are much more closely involved with one another than is the case in standard programmes.

A feature of this type of programme is that the curriculum is inseparably connected to the social context, which facilitates the achievement of the attainment targets. In addition, there is a stringent admission procedure (including an individual intake interview) aimed at realising the optimal match between student and programme. In this respect, the focus is on academic and/or professional capacity and motivation. The small scale of such programmes is an important condition for the creation and development of a high-level academic and/or professional community.

A recognisable educational environment including all related facilities is essential. After all, these programmes are intended for highly motivated and talented students. The learning outcomes realised by the students, the high level of the education provided and the success rates achieved should demonstrate that these programmes offer students an optimal education.

2 Assessment framework

The framework below sets out how the 'small-scale and intensive education' distinctive feature is defined per standard of the assessment frameworks. Not every standard is defined as not all standards are included in this framework. Independent of an application pursuant to Article 6.7 of the WHW, this assessment framework can also be used to apply for a 'small-scale and intensive education' distinctive feature.

A. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes are not only aimed at achieving a high level in the relevant academic discipline and/or professional practice, but also have a broader aim: to train socially skilled and initiative-rich scholars and/or professionals with a wide interest in social developments and issues within a multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary context.

Definition of standard 1 for limited and extensive programme assessments and limited and extensive initial accreditations.

B. Relationship between the goals and content of the programme

The content of the programme is inseparably connected to relevant extra-curricular activities, which ensures a high level and broadening of interests as set down in the intended learning outcomes.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 3 of the extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

C. Structure and didactic concept

The concept of the programme is aimed at creating an academic and/or professional community. Key terms are small-scale and intensively organised education, leading to a high number of hours of face-to-face teaching, close involvement between students and teachers and between students among themselves and socially relevant extra-curricular activities.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 4 of extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

D. Intake

The programme has a sound selection procedure in place, aimed at admitting motivated and academically and/or professionally talented students.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 5 of extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

E. Quality of staff

The teachers have high-quality knowledge of the relevant subject and feel involved in the distinctive nature of the programme.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 9 of extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

F. Number of staff

There is sufficient staff available to provide small-scale and intensive education and to ensure and develop individual contact between teachers and students.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 10 of extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

G. Available facilities

The programme has its own infrastructure with facilities for small-scale and intensive education and common extra-curricular social activities.

Definition of standard 2 of limited programme assessments and limited initial accreditations, and of standard 11 of extensive programme assessments and extensive initial accreditations.

H. Level realised

The content and the level of the final projects are in line with the level and the broadening of interests as set down in the intended learning outcomes.

Graduates are admitted to prestigious postgraduate programmes and/or jobs.

The success rates are substantially higher than those of other relevant programmes.

Definition of standard 3 of limited programme assessments, and of standard 16 of extensive programme assessments.

3 Procedure

The following procedures apply to applications for advice submitted to NVAO within the context of Article 6.7 of the WHW.

An institution can create a programme or track with small-scale and intensive education by modifying an existing programme or by establishing a new programme. If a new programme is being established, a macro-efficiency check is needed as well as an initial accreditation assessment.

The Minister will only grant approval based on a proposal of the institution and this approval is valid for an indefinite period of time. The advice of NVAO within the framework of this approval procedure is based on the proposal and not on previous experiences. For that reason, the institution should allow NVAO, on a one-off basis, to assess whether or not the ambitions (on which approval is to a large degree based) have been met (practice-based assessment by NVAO).

In principle, the practice-based assessment should be conducted six years after approval is granted. Important aspects of the practice-based assessment include, for example, the quality of graduates and the success rate of the programme, which are elements that cannot be assessed within the framework of the approval procedure. In principle, the timeframe for conducting such an assessment is tied to the duration of the accreditation period, i.e., six years. After six years have elapsed, the assumption is that the institution has had time to realise its envisaged ambitions for which the approval was granted.

The practice-based assessment can, however, take place earlier, provided the institution is able to demonstrate that it has realised its intended ambitions.

An institution may prefer to have NVAO provide advice at the same time as it is accrediting existing programmes or during the initial accreditation of programmes that have yet to be established. This is, however, not mandatory. An institution may prefer this because the advice is related to an assessment of aspects that are also assessed during the accreditation procedure, but then with special attention being paid to small-scale and intensive education. The context of the programme is of great importance in the assessment of whether the programme or track meets the criteria for small-scale and intensive education.

The experts who assess the programme in the accreditation procedure are very familiar with this context. It may therefore be preferable to link the assessment of small-scale and intensive education to the assessment of the programme as carried out by the external experts within the framework of the accreditation procedure. Combining the advice procedure of NVAO with accreditation can also be practical. It reduces the administrative burden on the part of NVAO and the applicant alike, because the same experts may be used for both the request for advice and the accreditation procedure.

If an institution chooses to have the assessment conducted at another time (not in combination with the accreditation of the programme) NVAO will compose a panel of experts and the rules that apply to the accreditation procedure or the initial accreditation assessment of a programme will apply in analogy to the assessment of the distinctive feature.

This means that the institution demonstrates, on the basis of a critical reflection, that the programme concerned meets the requirements set out in paragraph 2 of the assessment framework for the 'small-scale and intensive education' distinctive feature.