



NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

# NATIONAL PICTURE OF THE QUALITY AGREEMENTS

*FEBRUARY 2021*



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## Preface

The Coalition Agreement of the Rutte III Cabinet and the subsequent Higher Education sector agreements set out that the resources (the so-called study advance resources) that have become available upon the abolition of the study finance system would be invested in the improvement of educational quality. Higher Education institutions were required to develop plans to this end, in close collaboration with their students and staff, the participation bodies, and the internal supervisors. In early 2018, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science requested NVAO to assess these plans – the “Quality Agreements” – and to provide advice regarding the allocation of study advance resources to the publicly funded Higher Education institutions.

Between July 2018 and May 2020, NVAO reviewed the plans of 54 institutions and provided the Minister with pertinent advice. The reviews were conducted in accordance with the standard NVAO procedure, viz. by panels of independent, authoritative experts that submitted advisory reports to NVAO. The NVAO Board based its advice to the Minister on the reports of these panels.

With the memorandum at hand, NVAO is providing a sector-level overview of the plans submitted, the intended use of the resources, and the plan assessments. The reports warrant three key conclusions or observations:

First of all, we can conclude that the available resources are indeed spent on plans to improve educational quality. This constitutes a huge impetus for the higher education sector: according to the current budget figures, the resources will extend to EUR 574 million by 2024.

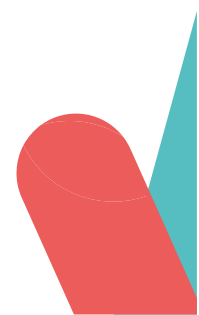
Secondly, the requirement to draw up the plans in close consultation with staff, students, participation bodies, and supervisors has significantly fostered active commitment among all the stakeholders within the institutions and has encouraged a dialogue on education. This is a second important gain; it is imperative that these relations should be preserved for the future, especially now that the authorities are considering vesting responsibility for and the supervision of educational quality with the institutions and their internal stakeholders, to a greater extent than is currently the case.

Thirdly, elaborating the plans in sufficiently concrete terms, in a viable and multi-year form, appeared difficult for several institutions. Approximately one third of the plans submitted initially received a negative report from the assessment panel and/or a negative recommendation by NVAO. Although such a score is not uncommon in other new assessment procedures, the outcome has nonetheless taken NVAO and the education world aback. Meanwhile, NVAO has commissioned AEF/ResearchNed to conduct an independent study into the backgrounds to this outcome. The report on this study will be presented to the Minister concurrently with this report.

Institutions that received a negative ministerial decision regarding the allocation of resources were given the opportunity to re-submit a revised plan to NVAO for review. Fortunately, after re-assessment, all the plans re-submitted so far could be presented to the Minister with a positive recommendation by NVAO.

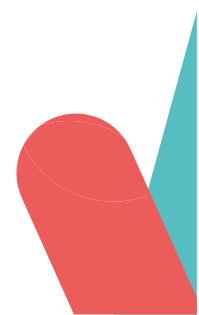
The assessment of and advising on the quality agreements involved a complex and intensive process, which had to be completed under great pressure of time. The efforts of many – panel members and chairs, secretaries and NVAO staff – have ensured its proper completion within the frameworks agreed upon. On behalf of the Board of NVAO, I thank everyone involved in this process for his or her efforts.

Anne Flierman  
Chairman, NVAO



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## Introduction

The introduction of the loan system in 2015 freed up money to invest in education: the so-called study advance resources. The “Confidence in the Future” Coalition Agreement (2017) indicated that these resources would be earmarked for “quality agreements at the institutional level”. The required improvement in the quality of higher education is set out in an agreement between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH); the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU); and the student organisations Dutch National Students Association (ISO) and National Union of Students (LSVb).

Each university is to draw up a quality improvement plan, in concert with their students and staff. The plans need to address one or more of the following six themes:

- More intensive and small-scale education (intensity of education);
- More and better student counselling;
- Study success, including transfer options, accessibility, and equal opportunities;
- Educational differentiation, including curricular and extracurricular talent development;
- Appropriate and good educational facilities;
- Further staff development (staff quality).

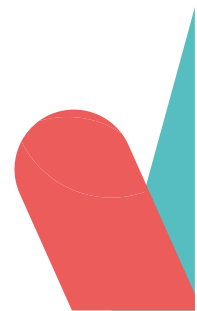
Furthermore, the Agreement sets out that the university participation body will be involved in drawing up the plans, that a long-term budget will specify how the funds will be spent, and that the participation body must consent to the plans and the spending of the funds.

The Quality Agreements offer the institutions room for making their own choices in terms of educational quality improvement. With effect from 2019, the universities have been required annually to give account of how they have spent the money. This information is contained in their annual reports. In addition to the annual report, the central participation body may also give its own account of the state of affairs.

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) reviews the plans and their implementation, and advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science accordingly. More information on the assessment of and decision-making on the plans of the institutions is provided on the web pages of NVAO and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

NVAO has agreed to compile a national picture that demonstrates what the Quality Agreements entail in terms of educational quality improvement and how the implementation of the agreements is progressing. NVAO bases this picture on the first versions of the plans and the early stages of their implementation.

The picture presented in the following chapters first provides an impression of the themes that the universities have addressed in their quality improvement plans. The subsequent paragraphs outline how the plans have satisfied each of the criteria, based on the protocol used to assess the plans.



## 1 General picture

This chapter provides a national picture of the choices made by the universities to improve the quality of their education. It is important to note that this picture is based on the plans submitted for the first review and on the annual reports for 2019. The plans submitted afterwards have not been taken into account in this picture; nor have any adaptations or changes ensuing from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As set out in the sector agreements, the plans must tie in with one or more of six themes set down in advance:

1. More intensive and small-scale education (intensity of education);
2. More and better student counselling (student counselling);
3. Study success, including transfer options, accessibility, and equal opportunities (study success);
4. Educational differentiation, including curricular and extracurricular talent development (educational differentiation);
5. Appropriate and good educational facilities (educational facilities);
6. Further staff development (staff quality).

According to the plans submitted, two universities are focusing on a single theme, whilst two other universities have opted to focus on two themes. Out of the total of 54 universities participating in the Quality Agreements, 23 have opted for agreements on educational quality improvement addressing all six themes.

Distribution of universities by number of themes selected

Figure 1

The selection of the number of themes addressed in the agreements is not related to the size of an institution nor to its orientation (university of applied sciences or research university). The two diagrams below pertain to the 23 universities that have formulated plans for all six themes. According to the first diagram, universities of applied sciences account for the vast majority. The second diagram shows that approximately half of these 23 institutions are large ones.

*Educational format and institution size in relation to universities whose plans address all six themes (N=23)*

Educational format	Institution size
UAS – Research Universities	Small – Medium - Large

Figure 2

Figure 3

*\* Clustered per student number as of 1 October 2019:  
Small < 2,000, Medium 2,001-10,000, Large > 10,001*

Furthermore, we have examined which themes the universities have elaborated into specific plans for educational improvement. As the table below shows, “Educational facilities”, “Student counselling”, and “Staff quality” are the themes most frequently addressed in the plans of the institutions.

Themes chosen
Intensity of education
Student counselling
Study success
Educational differentiation
Educational facilities
Staff quality

Figure 4

The under-representation of the intensity of education, study success, and educational differentiation themes in the plans may be explained by the fact that these themes were covered in the previous sector agreements (performance agreements).

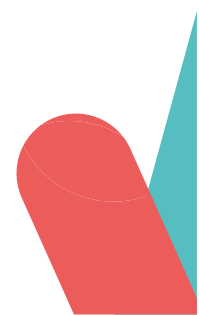
Incidentally, the number of themes being addressed in the strategic plans does not say much about the actual efforts being expended on such themes, in terms of both human resources and funding. Based on the initial plans underpinning this analysis, most funds appear to be spent on plans relating to the themes of “intensity of education”, followed by “educational facilities”. However, this warrants a distinct comment: approximately one third of the plans address multiple themes, which precludes their specific categorisation. Most of these plans have been developed at the faculty level. The panels have assessed such plans on the basis of supplementary material.

Although the Quality Agreements involve institutional-level plans, the plans have also been developed at the faculty, school, or academy levels. The universities were free to decide whether to draw up the plans at the central or decentralised level. The assessments showed that an institution’s existing internal control largely determined the development of the plans. According to the diagram below, most of the resources go to plans that have been drawn up at the central level. Only a small proportion of the plans have been drawn up entirely at the decentralised level, whilst a good 30 per cent involve a combination of centralised and decentralised development.

Centralised or decentralised spending
Centralised – Decentralised - Both

Figure 5

The analysis reveals that the size of an institution plays a decisive role in the spending level – centralised or decentralised – of the funds. Institutions providing a limited number of programmes have submitted virtually only central plans. Among medium-sized institutions, the picture is shifting slightly, whilst most of the large institutions have opted for a combination of centralised and decentralised plans and spending, as reflected in Figure 6.



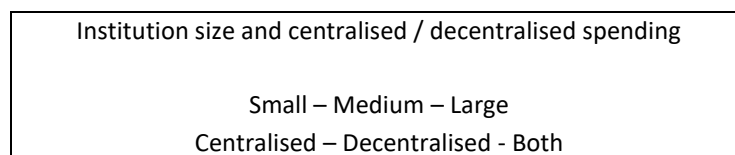


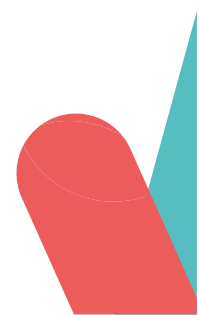
Figure 6

\* Clustered per student number as of 1 October 2019: Small < 2,000, Medium 2,001-10,000, Large > 10,001

In order to provide an idea of the plans that the institutions intend to realise within the themes, we have examined which plans occur most frequently. To this end, similar plans have been clustered. This means that the plan nomenclature does not correspond one-to-one to the designations in place at the institutions themselves. See the table below.

*What types of topics have been selected within the themes?*

1. Intensity of education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Raising number of contact hours</li> <li>2. Increasing staff availability (extension of staff hours, new appointments)</li> <li>3. Reducing group sizes</li> </ol>
2. Student counselling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Improving and expanding) educational career guidance</li> <li>2. Recruiting experts (coaches / psychologists / student counsellors) to intensify counselling processes</li> <li>3. Increasing / enhancing student well-being</li> </ol>
3. Study success	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expanding diversity and inclusiveness</li> <li>2. Student initiatives and communities</li> <li>3. Flexible education; improving alignment with the labour market; transfer opportunities; study skills</li> </ol>
4. Educational differentiation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attention for talent development</li> <li>2. Tailored approach (e.g., acceleration, offering a more comprehensive curriculum, personal learning routes)</li> <li>3. Flexibilisation of education (e.g., tests); internationalisation (e.g., exchanges, partnerships)</li> </ol>
5. Educational facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Digitalisation (e.g., IT training courses, Intranet optimisation, app development, digital learning environment)</li> <li>2. Expansion and improvement of number of student workstations</li> <li>3. Workplaces (e.g., language centre, workshops, labs)</li> </ol>
6. Staff quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff courses, programmes, training (e.g., master's programmes, digital competencies, pedagogical meetings, English)</li> <li>2. Deepening / development of education and teaching methods</li> <li>3. Development of research skills; learning culture</li> </ol>





## 2 Outcomes of ex-ante assessment - national picture

Chapter 1 has outlined the efforts of the institutions aimed at improving the quality of their education and the distribution of these efforts across the six themes to be improved. This chapter provides a national picture of the conclusions regarding the plans submitted by the universities.

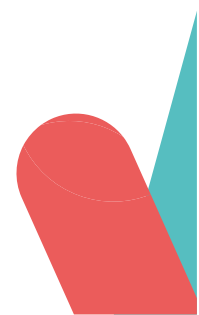
The plans were assessed by a panel of experts on the basis of an assessment protocol. This protocol has been drawn up in concert with all the parties involved: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the umbrella organisations VSNU and VH; the student organisations LSVb and ISO; and NVAO, which the parties had requested to coordinate and conduct the assessments. In the protocol, three criteria have been agreed on the basis of which the plans were to be assessed. The three criteria are:

- Criterion 1.* The plan contributes to the improvement of educational quality in a well-reasoned manner. The institution has clearly formulated how it intends to spend the study advance resources and what goals it intends to achieve with respect to the educational quality themes stated; its intentions chime with the context, history, and broader (educational) philosophy of the institution.
- Criterion 2.* The internal stakeholders have been sufficiently involved in the development of the plan and the plan commands sufficient support among internal and relevant external stakeholders.
- Criterion 3.* The intentions stated in the plan are realistic considering the proposed use of instruments and means, and considering the organisation and processes in place within the institution.

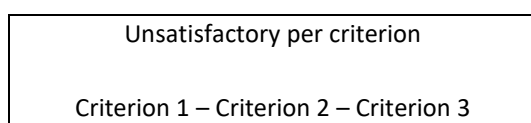
Each criterion comes with a description of what will be assessed. This is not detailed in this report, but if you would like more information, the protocol and elaborations are available [here](#).

Each criterion is rated as “satisfactory” or “not satisfactory”. To receive a positive final conclusion, institutions needed to score a “satisfactory” on all the criteria. This is quite a strict test, as a result of which not all the plans submitted by the 54 institutions involved could be awarded a positive conclusion following their initial assessment. NVAO has appointed several panels to assess the plans of the institutions. All the panels have conducted multiple assessments. In a total of 18 cases, the panels that conducted the 54 assessments provided a negative report to NVAO. NVAO monitors the individual assessment processes and ensures mutual consistency in the panel conclusions. On three occasions, this led NVAO to deviate from a positive panel conclusion. NVAO has submitted a total of 21 negative recommendations to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Subsequently, the Minister has conducted interviews with the institutions regarding the NVAO recommendations. In two cases, this has resulted in modification of the final conclusion. The Minister has taken a total of 19 negative decisions.

All the institutions that received a negative decision upon the first ex-ante assessment were able to submit a revised plan to NVAO for a second assessment. The revised plans have not been taken into account in this report.



An analysis of the assessments shows that criterion 3 has scored the most “unsatisfactory”, which has been the case with virtually all the institutions initially receiving a negative conclusion.

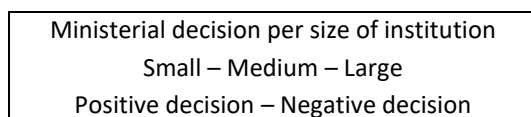


*Figure 7*

The analysis of the plans examined whether the topics covered earlier in this report – spread of efforts across the number of themes, centralised or decentralised plans, institution size – affected the probability of a negative conclusion.

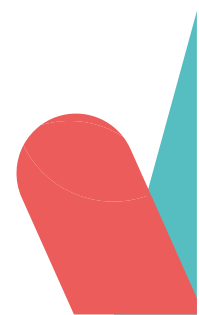
Of note is the fact that the number of themes for which an institution has drawn up plans appears to affect their chances of success. However, this difference is not significant. The four institutions concentrating on one or two themes all achieved a positive score. The 27 institutions opting for three, four or five themes averaged a success rate of 87 per cent. Out of the 23 institutions dividing their efforts across six themes, 42 per cent passed. Universities of applied sciences tended to focus on all six themes. The group of 23 institutions opting for all six themes comprises 18 universities of applied sciences and 5 research universities.

All in all, nearly half of all the universities of applied sciences received a negative decision from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science upon their initial assessment. The size of the institutions was irrelevant to the results, as the diagram below shows.



*Figure 8*

*\* Clustered per student number as of 1 October 2019: Small < 2,000, Medium 2,001-10,000, Large > 10,001*



### 3. Criterion 1 - overview

The three criteria underpinning the assessment of the strategic plans ensue from the points of departure for the Quality Agreements. The Quality Agreements are aimed at enhancing the quality of education. The quality is good and can be enhanced even further by giving additional impetus to already existing plans and activities. This is the point of departure for the first criterion.

*Criterion 1. The plan contributes to the improvement of educational quality in a well-reasoned manner. The institution has clearly formulated how it intends to spend the study advance resources and what goals it intends to achieve with respect to the educational quality themes stated; its intentions chime with the context, history, and broader (educational) philosophy of the institution.*

The plans, advisory reports, and annual reports clearly demonstrate that the institutions are continuously pursuing development and improvement or preservation of educational quality. The study advance resources reinforce and support this process.

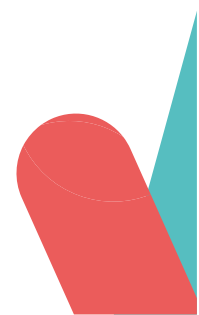
Across the board, all the plans tie in with the educational philosophy, strategic plans, or mission of the institution concerned. The underpinning of the choice of themes manifestly refers to spearheads, intentions, and ambitions. The institutions properly substantiate why particular themes chime or do not chime with the education they provide. Factors that are often taken into account in this respect include: the institutional philosophy and strategy; wishes of students; the needs of staff; the size of the institution; individual internal problem analyses; and organisational structure.

The plans predominantly comprise projects that provide new impetus to goals that the institutions have set for themselves. Rather than implementing a major change of course, the institutions tend to use the study advance resources to reinforce, expedite, or deepen their existing strategic plans.

Some institutions have expressly linked the formulation of the Quality Agreements to the development of a new strategic plan. The input and discussions on the Quality Agreements and the development of a strategic plan were closely intertwined.

A limited number of institutions have used the study advance resources for a more comprehensive educational reform. In some cases, a new education concept has been introduced or the curriculum has been updated, in consultation with all the internal stakeholders. Furthermore, a few institutions have seized this opportunity to set up a new, decentralised organisation structure.

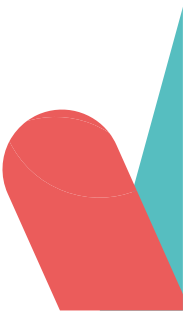
Virtually all the institutions clearly substantiate how the plans and measures will improve the quality of their education. The substantiation is not only manifest in the plans; the panels have witnessed its impact during their site visits. Several institutions are tying in with previous projects; these involve projects funded from pre-investments. Some institutions indicate that they would like to continue successful projects and initiatives, or that they are basing their plans for the study advance resources on such projects and initiatives.



A number of – predominantly larger – institutions are supplementing the study advance resources with their own funds, particularly in the early years of the Quality Agreements. Other institutions are funding certain themes from their own resources without addressing them in the Quality Agreements.

The panel advisory reports clearly demonstrate wide internal support for the plans at virtually all the institutions. The aims and objectives of the Quality Agreements were clear to the Executive Board, the staff, the participation bodies, and students; all the parties were able to clearly express the reasons for certain choices. This demonstrates proper internal coordination and wide consensus regarding the plan.

During the first round of ex-ante assessments, nine institutions failed to satisfy criterion 1. The majority of these institutions were advised to set down the (faculty) plans in more concrete terms. Other reasons included ambiguities in the budget; vague alignment with the strategic plan; or insufficient substantiation of the choice of themes and how they would contribute to improving the quality of education.



## 4. Criterion 2 - overview

The introduction of the student loan system has freed up the resources to be used for the realisation of the Quality Agreements.

The Agreements set out that the resources must be spent on enhancing educational quality, that the students currently enrolled must reap the benefits of this quality enhancement, and that they must also be actively involved in the development of the plans. These points of departure underpin the second criterion.

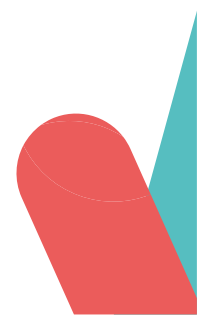
*Criterion 2.* The internal stakeholders have been sufficiently involved in the development of the plan and the plan commands sufficient support among internal and relevant external stakeholders.

The plans, advisory reports, and annual reports quite clearly demonstrate that the Quality Agreements have encouraged institutions to invest in participation bodies. The Quality Agreements have boosted the role and the position of the participation bodies. The plans developed under the Quality Agreements have vested greater responsibility with the participation body and virtually all the institutions have properly facilitated their participation bodies to fulfil this role. Participation bodies at both the centralised and decentralised levels have been involved from the start and had a substantial say in the plans. The participation bodies are fully fledged discussion partners of the Executive Boards. According to the reports, the participation bodies have experienced the process as valuable and useful. The participation bodies continue to be involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Quality Agreements.

A well-known phenomenon is the turnover in members of participation bodies, annually or every few years. That is one of the reasons for agreeing on a multi-year structure for the plans relating to the Quality Agreements, in order to have both the Board and the participation body commit to the agreements for a longer period of time. Some institutions have experienced that know-how on the Quality Agreements is transferred insufficiently and incompletely upon the appointment of new members. Several institutions attempt to prevent such deficiencies by setting up training days or training sessions for the new members of the participation body.

Virtually all the institutions have not only contacted the official participation body but also their wider rank and file, comprising students, teachers, and other staff, in order to garner broad-based commitment to the plans. Interviews, sessions, and surveys – such as staff satisfaction studies, the National Student Survey, or self-designed questionnaires – have been set up to gather input from (internal) stakeholders. A few institutions have used a digital interactive platform to gain inspiration and collect input from their rank and file. Several institutions have also contacted alumni, and a few have involved knowledge centres in the Quality Agreements. Furthermore, the institutions have held mutual consultations regarding the Quality Agreements.

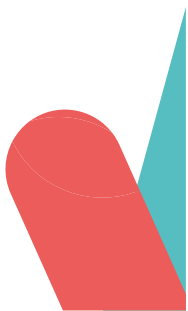
Many institutions have set up a committee, working group or project leader to embark on the process of generating and processing ideas. Many committees or working groups consist of students, staff, directors, and policy advisers.



All the institutions have requested and received approval from their Supervisory Board for their plans. Depending on the existing administrative relation between an institution's Executive Board and its Supervisory Board, the Supervisory Board has either been informed of the process or been involved in the planning stage in a more direct manner. Whereas virtually all the participation bodies showed great to exceedingly great commitment, we have noted that at some institutions, active commitment of the Supervisory Boards to the improvement and assurance of educational quality was fairly limited.

Involving the professional field – as an external stakeholder – was not a requirement. Institutions that valued its input have consulted the professional field in the planning stage. The majority of such contacts have taken place between the institutions and a professional field advisory committee, representatives of key collaboration partners, or alumni. A few institutions are also involving the professional field in the implementation of the plans.

Eventually, five institutions failed to satisfy criterion 2, mainly because the faculty involvement process and the participation body consent process had not been sufficiently completed. Some institutions failed to ensure sufficient facilitation or involvement of the participation body.



## 5. Criterion 3 - overview

All the parties involved in drawing up the protocol insisted on having the plans elaborated in concrete terms and capable of practical implementation within the timeframe covered by the Agreements. An important condition was that annual reconsideration of the Agreements should be avoided and that the plans should clearly specify the goals to which the resources would be allocated for a longer period of time. Thus, all the stakeholders, and especially the students, would have clarity regarding the actual goals on which the resources would be spent over a period of multiple years. This constituted the basis for the third criterion.

*Criterion 3.* The intentions stated in the plan are realistic considering the proposed use of instruments and means, and considering the organisation and processes in place within the institution.

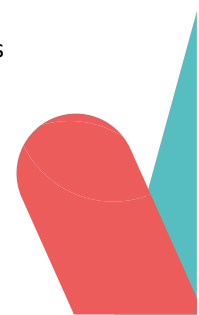
This chapter explains whether the plans have been concretised for a multi-year period and how their implementation will be monitored. As stated above, the elaboration of this criterion has presented particular difficulties for several institutions: most of the negative conclusions pertained to criterion 3.

Differences can be observed from one institution to the next as to the manner in which they have concretised their plans. The vast majority of the institutions have adopted a bottom-up approach in the substantiation of their plans. Many have set up central frameworks within which the faculties, academies or programmes could present ideas – in consultation with the participation body and students – to be substantiated in a centralised plan. Several plans featured a top-down approach or were based on existing plans, some of which ensue from the pre-investments. A bottom-up or top-down approach was found to be irrelevant to the chance of plans scoring a “satisfactory” on this criterion.

Across the board, the 36 strategic plans awarded a positive score on this criterion were substantiated in a transparent manner. The aims, intentions, activities, parties involved, desired results, and the budgets were appropriately elaborated. Many activities and actions outline goals that impact students and staff, and that visibly contribute to educational quality. The majority of these institutions have formulated concrete policy actions, processes, and activities geared to their goals and intentions, at both the centralised and decentralised levels.

The initial failure of eighteen strategic plans to satisfy criterion 3 can mainly be attributed to the lack of concretised, multi-year measures in these plans. Concretisation and multi-year coverage (2019 -2021) are crucial to the assessment, as these aspects provide the insight required to assess whether the plans are practical and can be implemented within the timeframe set. Although multi-year concretisation of the plans has been a firm criterion from the start of the Quality Agreements, this requirement may have been insufficiently clear to some institutions in the preparatory and elaboration stages. In the evaluation of the ex-ante assessment of the Quality Agreements by NVAO (see report) this is found to have been a key element in terms of the number of negative conclusions regarding this criterion.

If the plans did feature a concrete elaboration of the proposed measures, the institutions scoring an “unsatisfactory” on this criterion had failed to sufficiently elaborate such measures from a multi-year perspective. Furthermore, many of these plans also lacked a multi-year



budget for the allocation of the study advance resources. This allocation was relevant in the purview of verifying whether the institutions were allocating the resources obtained to the implementation of the Quality Agreements, and to gain insight into the viability of the proposed measures.

Several other institutions scored an “unsatisfactory” on this criterion because of their failure to clearly substantiate how the proposed measures would be monitored. Monitoring of the measures is important in this criterion in order to determine whether the institution is keeping an eye on their progress.

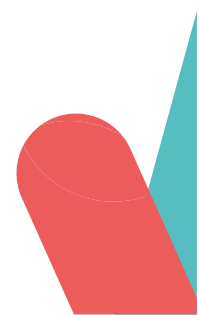
To ensure structural and efficient monitoring, many institutions have opted for incorporating the monitoring of the Quality Agreements into their regular planning and control cycle (PDCA cycle). The institutions are free to decide on the structure of such cycles. Distinguishing features include indicators, reporting frequency, and centralised or decentralised accountability. Several institutions have developed specific instruments to monitor the plans, such as, e.g., digital environments, dashboards, qualitative monitoring methods, self-designed instruments, or committees to monitor progress and inform one another.

This means that the majority of the plans are largely up to par. As agreed, the (policy) actions and processes for the first phase of the Quality Agreements have largely been formulated clearly for the period up to and including 2021. Some institutions have drawn up concrete plans covering the entire period (end of 2024) but most have outlined the plans for the remaining years (2022 – 2024), in accordance with the agreements, and have provided frameworks for further concretisation. This affords the institutions room for adjustments, wherever necessary, and for reviewing their plans, as expressly set down in the Quality Agreements. The associated budgets chime with the concretised intentions.

As set down in the Quality Agreements and in the protocol, institutions that initially received a negative conclusion are allowed one year to improve their plans and re-submit them to NVAO for assessment.

In the purview of this report, we have also studied the chapters on the Quality Agreements in the annual reports on 2019. Most of these chapters were well written and clear. In these cases, the reports described the Quality Agreements process, the selection of themes, and the progress made, and featured a (revised) budget.

Several institutions have shifted projects on to the next year or have amended their budgets. Changes in the plans must be substantiated clearly and require consent from the participation body. In the annual reports, the participation bodies are given the opportunity to reflect on the Quality Agreements. Some institutions have paid little attention to the Quality Agreements in their annual reports or failed to include a description of the progress made, usually because the ex-ante assessment or the decision-making process did not take place until the end of 2019.





## 6. Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this analysis of the plans is that the study advance resources are being spent on plans to improve educational quality. The plans submitted by the institutions are properly aligned with the six themes selected for the strengthening of education; they are clearly formulated and elaborated. Many activities and actions outline goals that impact students and staff, and that visibly contribute to educational quality.

Another important gain of the Quality Agreements is a considerable reinforcement of the role of the participation bodies. They are closely involved in the planning process within the institutions. Evaluations by the participation bodies in annual reports state, inter alia, that they have found the process informative. Perpetuation of this role is important, also in the purview of further developments in education. Not only the official participation bodies have been involved in the planning; many institutions have mobilised students and staff. The large-scale input from staff and students has garnered considerable commitment to and wide support for the plans within the institutions.

Most of the institutions have managed to properly link their plans to their existing philosophies and have appropriately substantiated how particular plans and goals would contribute to educational quality.

The Supervisory Board played a key role in the Quality Agreements. In some cases, the involvement of the Supervisory Boards remained formal and slightly distant. Some institutions whose participation body was closely involved in the planning have refrained from involving their Supervisory Board. With a view to potential future developments in the higher education landscape, such as institutional accreditation, active involvement of all the Supervisory Boards in educational development and quality assurance processes is definitely advisable.

On account of continuity in policy and implementation, and of multi-year commitment and involvement of both the Board and the participation body, we have expressly opted for including multi-year planning as a criterion. In the first round of assessments, the multi-year concrete substantiation turned out to be the main stumbling block for the institutions. This report sketches a national picture on the basis of the first plans and assessments. By now, most of the subsequent assessments have been completed. So far, all the subsequent assessments have led to a positive recommendation by NVAO.

