

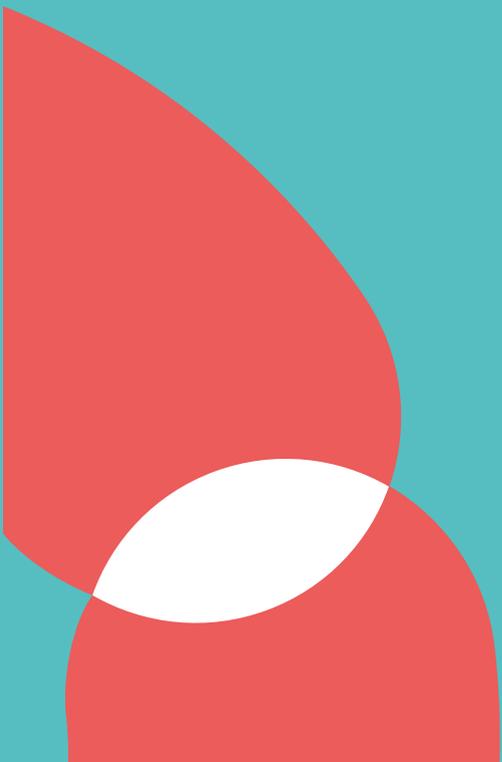


NVAO • FLANDERS

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FLANDERS 2019-2025

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

JUNE 2020

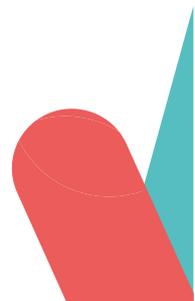


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ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

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This assessment framework applies to the universities and universities of applied sciences (and arts) in Flanders.

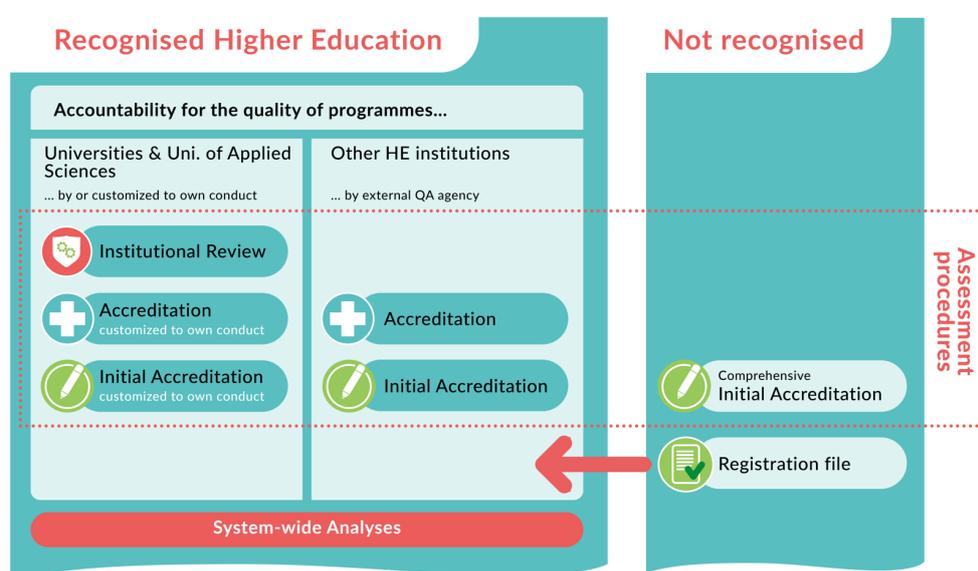
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Overview of the quality assurance system for 2019-2025

The Quality Assurance System – Flanders 2019-2025 focuses on the quality of individual programmes and its accountability. This is achieved either through the institutional review that enables universities and universities of applied sciences to account for the quality of their programmes themselves, or through the involvement of an external body. An external body is a quality assurance agency registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, www.eqar.eu), or recognised by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO, www.nvao.net) 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). External, independent experts (peers) are engaged in each assessment of educational quality, either by the institution itself or in the assessment panel convened by NVAO or a quality assurance agency.



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 NVAO accredited programme on their website. The **institutional review** assesses the manner in which a university or university college 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. The period of recognition as a new programme is followed by a fully-fledged **programme accreditation**: the official decision by NVAO that the programme meets pre-determined requirements regarding quality and level. Following such 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 college's inability to confirm the quality of its accredited programmes, NVAO will

regain this responsibility. The confirmation of quality will then be done by NVAO on a programme-by-programme basis.

The initial accreditation and programme accreditation procedures are tailor-made: they are designed to optimally complement each institution's conduct 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 body. Each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an **initial accreditation**. Subsequently, it is subjected to periodic **programme accreditations**.

System-wide analyses

System-wide analyses are intended to map out and share good practices within the higher education community. This encourages institutions to learn from one another, specifically with respect to issues relating to educational policy and programme quality.

Non-recognised higher education

Non-recognised education providers may be registered by the Flemish Government as providers of recognised higher education programmes. Such recognition is based on a **registration file**, supplemented by a positive NVAO decision regarding the (potential) quality of the education they provide following the **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. The review panel that carries out this assessment 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.

This 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. This involves examining how the institution ensures that the educational policy is effective, in other words, how the institution works towards the set goals. The assessment 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 conduct is the totality of all actions, processes, practices, procedures, and tools that enable the institution to confirm the quality of its programmes.

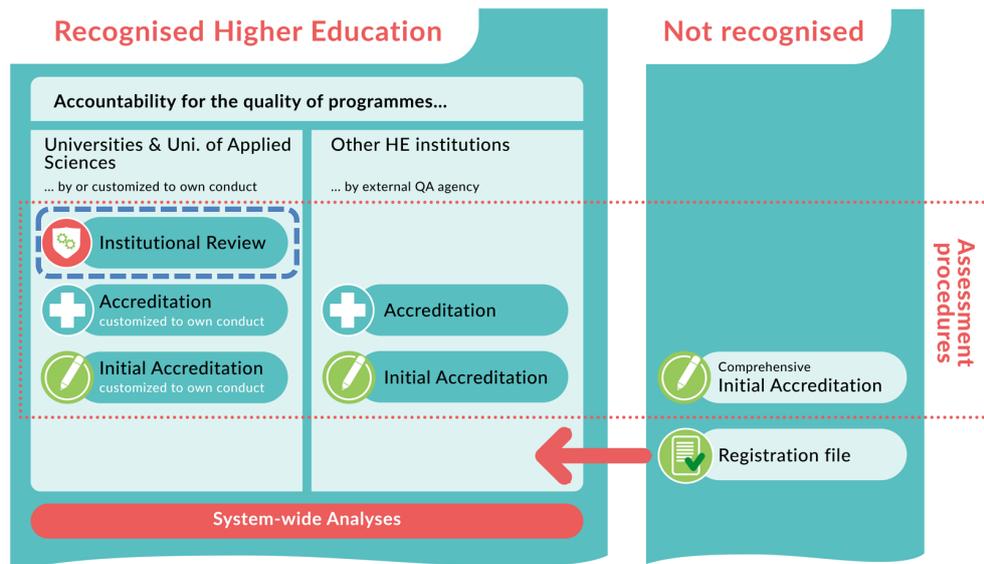
Confirming quality implies:

- assessing the performance through quality assurance activities;
- documenting findings including strengths and points for attention;
- ensuring that issues are addressed, both reactive for the specific case and proactive for similar future situations;
- reporting on the findings and follow-up thereof cyclically and per programme;
- deciding on the quality by the institutional management to demonstrate, internally and externally, that the quality delivered meets the requirements.

In all aspects of the institutional review, specific attention is paid to the quality culture within the institution. A quality culture is an organisational culture in which all stakeholders in a self-evident manner continuously strive for quality and quality enhancement.

In addition, it is ascertained how the institution ensures the involvement of internal and external stakeholders on the one hand and external and independent peers and experts on the other hand.

The institutional review is mandatory for all the institutions in Flanders that are recognised as a university college or university and is conducted every six years according to a fixed calendar. A positive or conditionally positive outcome will result in the extension of the accreditation periods for all programmes provided by the institution that have been fully accredited before.



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

The Flemish quality assurance system is based on trust and vests a large measure of responsibility with the institution. In order to have this perspective reflected in the assessment procedures, NVAO and the assessment panel adopt NVAO's Appreciative Approach. Rather than a quality assurance model, NVAO's Appreciative Approach constitutes a philosophy, a mind-set, a style or an attitude that directs the methodology of the procedure and the substantiation of all its components. Through NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the focus is placed on "what" is and "what" could be within the applicable context, without focusing on what should be or substantiating the "how". The latter falls under the autonomy of the institution. NVAO's Appreciative Approach does not hinder the formation of judgements, but relies on dialogue, on co-creation, and on common understanding.

The panel conducting an institutional review 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 holds a view of its own with respect to education and the quality of its programmes and makes its own choices in the pursuance of its educational policy. The panel verifies whether its educational policy is being implemented successfully.

An open dialogue is a key element in the procedure. Special attention is paid to what is going well, with an emphasis on the embedding and fostering of successful processes. Nonetheless, the panel will bring out and critically examine any lack of clarity or points for attention in the institution's pursuance of its policy, with the goal of enabling the institution to further develop and improve such aspects.

In the light of NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the institution itself interprets this assessment framework and further substantiates it. The chosen educational policy and the context of the institution are leading in the assessment. In this way, NVAO recognises the responsibility that institutions have taken on in recent years with regard to the development of their educational policy and their quality assurance at programme level.

The present assessment framework comprises two parts: the assessment principle with the assessment ground and assessment scale and assessment rule, and the assessment procedure coordinated by NVAO.

2 Assessment principle

2.1 Assessment ground

The institutional review is substantiated on the basis of four coherent questions:

- Is the educational policy in line with the educational vision of the institution and the societal challenges it is facing within its own context?
- Does the institution ensure the effectiveness of its educational policy; in other words, how does the institution work 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?

The above questions determine the scope of the assessment conducted in the light of the review.

The institution is autonomously responsible for its vision of higher education and the quality of it. Based on this vision, the institution develops an 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 are not questioned but must match the way the institution presents itself.

The institutional review examines how the institution implements its education policy and how it monitors that at all levels in the institution people work towards the set goals. A constant pursuit of quality enhancement is evidenced by the quality culture that is present throughout the institution.

Confirming the quality of education implies that the board of the institution must demonstrate the quality of each programme, either at regular intervals or continuously. This means that the institution has in place a conduct and involves internal and external stakeholders and external peers and experts at programme level. The conduct also ensures that the study programme complies with the relevant regulations with respect to the admission of graduates to corresponding posts or professions. The results and outcomes of the conduct enable the board of the institution to make a statement per study programme about the quality in which both strengths and points for attention are presented. For every programme with demonstrated quality, the manifestation of all of the following quality features is confirmed:

1. The programme's learning outcomes constitute a transparent 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 the developments in the professional field, and is relevant to society;
3. The staff allocated to the programme provide the students with optimum opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes;
4. The programme offers the students adequate and easily accessible services, facilities, and counselling;
5. The teaching and learning environment encourages the students to play an active role in the learning process and fosters smooth study progress;
6. The assessment of students reflects the learning process and concretises the intended learning outcomes;
7. The programme provides comprehensive and readable information on all stages of study;
8. Information regarding the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.

The quality of programmes is assured in an internationally accepted manner. This entails 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 ESG elements that typify high-quality higher education programmes. However, the quality features are not separate standards that have to be judged individually. On the one hand, they guide the institutions in developing and expanding the conduct, and on the other hand they direct the panel in the evaluation of the conduct as a part of the educational policy. The panel examines how the quality features are integrated within the own conduct, either in the same or in a different form. It is by no means the intention that the review panel itself will assess programmes on the basis of the quality features.

2.2 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 decision institutional review

The institution is assessed on the basis of the integral assessment ground, whereby the coherent questions are not weighted separately. The decision ensues from a holistic and substantiated judgement based on the findings from the review, unless it is established that the institution is unable to confirm the quality of its accredited programs in an internationally accepted manner. In the latter case, a negative decision is the only possible outcome.

The basic philosophy of the quality assurance system dictates that the assessment is based on the assumption 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 provides evidence of 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 a conduct in place that confirms the quality of every accredited programme in an internationally accepted manner.

Recommendations do not contradict a positive institutional review decision.

Negative institutional review decision

The institution is unable to confirm the quality of each accredited programme in an internationally accepted manner or the institution - in the context of an additional institutional review - has not met the conditions imposed on it as a result of a positive institutional review decision with limited validity.

Positive institutional review decision with limited validity

In all other cases, a positive decision is taken with a limited period of validity. This means that conditions are imposed that specify what the institution must achieve in order to maintain a positive institutional review decision after the limited validity has expired. The limited period of validity is set by the panel in consultation with the institution and

takes into account the period within which the institution can fulfil the conditions. The maximum duration is three years and, at the latest three months before the end of the duration, a new institutional review decision is made on the basis of an additional institutional review that is limited to the elements to which the conditions apply. In addition to conditions, recommendations can also be formulated.

3 Assessment procedure

In accordance with NVAO's Appreciative Approach, all the steps in the assessment process are designed in an appreciative manner, from the training of the panel members to the assessment conducted by the review panel and the final report.

3.1 Preliminary consultations (optional)

In the build-up to the official application, the institution may conduct preliminary consultations with NVAO, up to three months before the established submission date of the application file, to confer on the following aspects:

- Timing and steps in the procedure, including the schedule for the dialogue between the review panel and the institution;
- Profile of the review panel and combination of expertise commanded by the members;
- Drafting of the Critical Reflection.

3.2 Critical Reflection

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

- Reflecting on the own educational policy, ensuring that that reflection is widely supported within the institution;
- To provide the panel with an insight into the educational policy of the institution, the context in which the institution is rolling out its educational policy and the choices that have been made, the state of affairs with regard to the implementation of the educational policy, and the strengths and points for attention that are thereby identified.

To achieve that dual purpose, the Critical Reflection includes:

- Documentation that provides insight into the educational vision, the educational policy, and the organisational structure of the institution and the way in which policies are implemented, evaluated and adjusted. In addition, the documentation explains the conduct for confirming the quality of programmes and the way in which internal and external stakeholders, peers and experts are involved. Reference is made to the public information that results from the analysis of results and outcomes of the conduct. The institution also illustrates the existing quality culture. This documentation enables the panel to carry out an assessment of the answers to the four coherent questions. The specific format and content of the documentation is not determined and is left to 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 policies and the substantive choices that have been made. The panel does not elaborate on this in its assessment. It adopts the 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 the review, the panel does the same and the insights from both sides are brought together to come to 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 is monitoring the quality of its education within the relevant societal and international context, and how it is involving its stakeholders, external peers, and external experts in this process. In its report, the institution refers 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 50 pages, excluding any attachments that are kept to a minimum. It is accepted 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.

3.3 Application

For each institution, NVAO sets the deadline for submission of the application file, based on the calendar of the institutional reviews that is determined in consultation with the VLUHR. Two or more universities or two or more universities of applied sciences can 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.

Applications must meet the following procedural requirements: they must be submitted electronically via our procedural webpage or via aanvraag@nvaio.net, comprising an application letter signed by the board of the institution and the Critical Reflection of the institution, as described in paragraph 3.2. Upon his/her request, the institution will send a hard copy version to a panel member.

3.4 Admissibility

NVAO will check the admissibility of the application to verify whether the procedural requirements have been met. If the application is inadmissible, the institution will be informed accordingly within a timeframe of 15 calendar days. Subsequently, the institution will be asked to complete the application, in consultation with the process coordinator from NVAO.

3.5 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. It covers the costs entailed in the work performed by the panel (remuneration, travel expenses, hotel accommodation, et cetera), which are paid by NVAO.

3.6 Composition of the panel

The review by peers is at the heart of the Flemish quality assurance system. 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 conduct for confirming the quality of programmes. In order to be able to take the context of the institution into account, NVAO always confers with the institution when convening a panel.

A review panel comprises a minimum of five members, among whom a chairperson is assigned; it is supported by an NVAO process coordinator and an external secretary. The NVAO process coordinator and the external secretary 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. This means that over the five years prior to the appointment of the panel, its members must not have had any connections or ties with the institution. All the panel members, the secretary, and the process coordinator must sign a code of deontology. This code of deontology is published on the NVAO website.

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

- In order to take maximum account of an institution's specific context and to survey the broader framework within which an institution is operating, the panel must command thorough knowledge of higher education in Flanders;
- International expertise is represented on the panel in order to enable it to think out of the box of the Flemish higher education system and to verify whether the qualitative implementation of the educational policy meets common international standards within higher education; to make this happen at the level of an institution, the international expert(s) need(s) to be employed in higher education outside Flanders;
- Educational expertise makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the educational policy of an institution and to be able to assess whether the institution works towards the set goals;
- Evaluation expertise enables the panel to assess whether the institution is capable of confirming the quality of education in its programmes by means of its educational policy and more in particular 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 different perspective than that of higher education;
- Managerial expertise allows the panel to verify whether the policy pursued has been developed with sufficient support, and whether it is effectively rolled out, monitored and adjusted;
- Student-related expertise enables the panel to verify whether students' interests and a student-centred approach are taken into account in such aspects as the information provision to students, student facilities, student counselling and guidance, and student participation. Preferably, student experts have experience as a student representative within a programme or institution.

Panel members are still active (not necessarily employed) in their field of expertise at the time at which the panel is appointed. This also applies to the student who sits on the panel.

NVAO informs the institution of the panel composition. The institution has the right to lodge a substantiated appeal to the panel composition 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 the panel members receive thorough training by NVAO prior to the procedure. This training prepares the panel members for their tasks and responsibilities, and trains them in practicing NVAO's Appreciative Approach. Furthermore, NVAO provides the panel members with a manual on its Appreciative Approach.

3.7 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 the dialogue are agreed upon in consultation with the institution and the panel. The institution can opt for an exploratory site visit in order to allow the panel to clarify the profile of the institution and the context in which it operates. The panel will in any case conduct an in-depth site visit. NVAO organises site visits in consultation with the institution. Closure periods of the institution, the attendance of the institutional management and the availability of discussion partners are taken into account.

During a site visit, the panel can carry out part of the dialogue online, for example to meet certain stakeholders for whom the transfer to the institution is difficult to organise.

The panel prepares for the dialogue with the institution during (a) preliminary meeting(s).

The content of the site visit is proposed by the institution, in consultation with the process coordinator who checks the proposal with the chair of the panel. After reading the Critical Reflection, the panel members indicate which topics they would like to add. Once the schedule is finalised, the institution can indicate the positions for which it is proposing discussion partners. Participants may take part in multiple interviews.

The following discussion partners must definitely be involved throughout 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.

Considering that a panel may request additional information, or that the institution may wish to present further information in the process of the dialogue, the schedule features an open timeslot. This also enables the institution to submit additional documentation to the panel or to schedule additional interviews.

3.8 Exploratory dialogue (optional)

The panel has at least six weeks to review the Critical Reflection and the associated documentation. Based on their first reading of the documentation, the panel members individually draw up an initial appreciation of the institution. This appreciation is aimed at getting acquainted with the educational policy of the institution, and the choices that the institution has made to respond to the context in which it operates. The panel members explicitly state which strengths and focus points they recognise.

To further refine the image of the institution and the context in which it operates, the institution can allow the panel to conduct an exploratory site visit of a maximum of one day. The panel can also opt to (partly) organise this dialogue via a (series of) online meeting(s).

The institution draws up a schedule in consultation with the process coordinator and the panel (chair). The way in which the dialogue 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 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 to the institution the opportunity to gain this insight, observers from the institution may be present during all meetings 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 at some point participates in one or more meetings as a discussion partner, he or she may at that time be replaced by another observer.

During a preliminary meeting, the panel puts together the individual initial appreciations and discusses which clarifying questions should be asked to 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 dialogue at a later stage. It also gives the panel the opportunity to get some idea of the (informal) quality culture.

There is a "feedback break" between the interviews. This break enables both the panel and the institution 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 insights of the panel.

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 dialogue in order to find answers to the coherent questions from the assessment ground.

3.9 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 the proposal for the assessment it wishes to conduct and delivers it to the institution. The institution then has the option to prepare a substantive supplement to the Critical Reflection within six weeks. This is by no means an obligation. This supplement only addresses the research questions of the panel and the review trails that the panel will carry out.

The supplement has a maximum of 10 pages, excluding any attachments that are kept to a minimum. The institution must submit this supplement to NVAO no later than three weeks prior to the in-depth site visit.

3.10 In-depth dialogue

The in-depth dialogue 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 research questions of the panel. If no exploratory dialogue has taken place, the panel has at least six weeks to review the Critical Reflection and the associated documentation. The panel must submit its final proposal for the assessment it wishes to conduct to the institution no later than nine weeks before the in-depth site visit. Based on (the supplement to) the Critical Reflection, the panel formulates a (second) appreciation of the institution. This appreciation is aimed at the identification of strengths and points for attention regarding the educational policy and elaborates on the research questions of the panel.

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 its judgement. The panel can carry out part of the dialogue online, for example to meet certain stakeholders for whom the transfer to the institution is difficult to organise. The in-depth site visit covers a maximum of three days. The panel must substantiate the duration in its report. If it has not conducted an exploratory dialogue, the panel members must allow sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the context of the institution.

Prior to the in-depth site visit, the institution receives:

- A list of functions from which discussion partners can be delegated;
- The additional documentation that the panel may wish to look into before or during the in-depth visit;
- A detailed schedule for the site visit that is drawn up in consultation with the institution.

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 NVAO's Appreciative Approach, the underlying philosophy is that the panel and the institution engage in a dialogue to 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 meetings 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 at some point participates in one or more meetings as a discussion partner, he or she may at that time be replaced by another observer.

During a preliminary meeting, the panel puts together the individual appreciations and discusses which questions should be asked 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 dialogue at a later stage. It also gives the panel the opportunity to get some idea of the (informal) quality culture.

There is a "feedback break" between the interviews. This break enables both the panel and the institution 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 insights of the panel.

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, the panel pays special attention to the quality culture present in the institution and the support for the educational policy. The panel can always request to look into additional documentation or to conduct further interviews. At the end of each trail, the panel engages with those responsible within the institution to share and verify the findings.

At the end of the in-depth visit, the institution and the panel share the most important findings in the light of the philosophy of NVAO's Appreciative Approach. This closing session is an interactive reflection that allows the institution and the panel to develop a common understanding of the status of the implementation of the educational policy and the quality management within the institution.

If, during the assessment process, matters arise that could impact 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.

3.11 Assessment and assessment report

The assessment conducted by the panel is structured by reference to the four coherent questions contained in 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 preliminary meeting of the panel, the secretary collects all the 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.

Therefore, the report consists of a linear presentation of the assessment with factually substantiated findings, considerations and insights from the panel. In the assessment, the panel pursues various lines and formulates preliminary conclusions that evolve further in the course of

the assessment and after weighing the total amount of evidence. It is important that these various lines and interim conclusions are not interpreted in isolation.

The report is primarily directed at the institution to return to it the story about its educational policy that has come about in dialogue with the panel. The report thus tries to create added value for the institution in the light of a 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 decision to be taken regarding the institutional review. Its judgement is based on the assessment scale and assessment rule as set out in this assessment framework after weighing positive and critical elements from the factually substantiated findings of the conducted assessment.

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

- The full name of the institution(s) subjected to the review;
- The location(s) of the institution(s) under consideration;
- The composition of the panel;
- The schedule(s) of 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 dialogue has been completed. The process coordinator assesses the internal consistency of the report and the justification of the advice and, if necessary, proposes adjustments to the panel to clarify the findings or strengthen the substantiation of the advice. After all the panel members have approved the contents of the assessment report, the panel chair will endorse the report a first time.

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

3.12 Decision-making NVAO

NVAO will take a decision for the institutional review within a period of 12 months following receipt of the application and in accordance with the assessment scale and assessment rule as set out in this framework. To this end, NVAO draws up a draft decision based on the panel's assessment report. In its decision, NVAO may deviate from the judgement contained in the assessment report, stating its reasons to do so. When drawing up its 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.

The draft decision and the underlying assessment report are presented to the NVAO board. The approved draft decision and the underlying report are forwarded to the institution, whereupon the board of the institution is allowed a term of 15 calendar days to lodge an appeal to 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.

3.13 Internal and external appeals

Any (draft) decision by NVAO is open to an internal appeal to NVAO and an external appeal to the Council of State, in accordance with the Regulations for decision-making procedures by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders [In Dutch: “Reglement inzake bestuursbeginselen van toepassing bij de besluitvorming door de Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie – NVAO Vlaanderen”].

3.14 Publication

After the decision-making procedure, NVAO publishes the decision and the underlying assessment report on its website, and forwards both documents to the Flemish Minister of Education.

