



NVAO • NETHERLANDS DEPARTMENT

ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY AGREEMENTS HIGHER EDUCATION 2019-2024

PROTOCOL

MAY 2018



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This protocol contains the requirements associated with an NVAO assessment procedure, which are separated from the NVAO assessment framework.

Name of procedures	Protocol of assessment of quality agreements in higher education 2019-2024 This protocol concerns the details of an Order in Council that has yet to be adopted: the 'Besluit kwaliteitsbekostiging hoger onderwijs' (expected to enter into force on 1 January 2019). Changes to this version resulting from the Order are therefore possible.
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Introduction

On 9 April 2018, the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science made agreements with the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Dutch National Students' Association (ISO), and the Dutch Student Union (LSVb) about the form that quality agreements for higher education for the period from 2019 to 2024 would take. The revenues that will be released as a result of the introduction of the student loan system will be linked to these agreements in the next few years. The parties are aiming to use the revenues to raise the quality of higher education. They agree that involvement on the part of the education community, in particular the participation bodies, with the quality agreements is essential, during the time that the plans are being devised and implemented alike.

This protocol sets out the details of the independent external assessments agreed by the parties of the plans of individual institutes on how the revenues from the student loan system are to be used and of the assessments of what the plans are achieving.

The focus of the assessment of the plans will be targeted at how the plans are devised, the proposed expenditure, and what this expenditure is designed to achieve. The fulfilment of these proposals will be the main feature of the assessment, as will the involvement of participation bodies and other relevant stakeholders.

The protocol is a stand-alone assessment instrument that is closely aligned to the NVAO accreditation framework 2016 and the methods described therein.

For institutes that have already requested an institutional audit (ITK) or are intending to apply for one, the processes for assessing the plan on how to use the revenues from the student loan system and the ITK can be combined in order to reduce the extra costs of the assessment of their plans as much as possible. The assessment of plans and the ITK will always result in two separate reports.

This protocol describes three verification moments: the assessment of the plans in 2019, the assessment of their progress in the autumn of 2022, and the evaluation of what the plans have achieved. This evaluation will coincide with the next ITK round or will take place six years after the original assessment of the plan.

A. Criteria

Below are the criteria by which plans for using revenues from the student loan system (hereinafter, 'the plan') are to be assessed, by which they have progressed in 2022, and the evaluation. This concerns institute-level assessments.

Words in **bold** indicate elements that feature specifically in the reports.

A.1 Assessing the plan

In the period up to April 2020, the institutes' plans will be assessed. The assessments will be carried out by panels of experts, each of whom will visit an institute.

The following criteria will be used to assess whether each institute's plan envisages quality:

Criterion 1

The plan makes a reasoned contribution to improving educational quality. The institute's proposals for the revenues from the student loan system and the aims it seeks to realise with them in relation to the named educational quality themes are clearly formulated and are in keeping with the institute's context, history, and broad vision.

Effect: For each of the **six educational quality themes**, the institute has made a **clear choice**. For each theme, it has provided a reasoned account of how it intends to spend the revenues from the student loan system (hereinafter, 'proposals') and what they intend to achieve through these proposals, or indeed why they do not intend to use said revenues for a particular theme. Proposals and aims may apply to the entire institute, but also to certain parts of it or to specific groups of students.

The institutes will describe in explicit terms their **justification for their choices in relation to their broader educational proposals, vision**, history, and context; this can include their long-term budgetary developments. The proposals and aims make a reasoned contribution to **improving educational quality**.

Criterion 2

The internal stakeholders are sufficiently involved with the drawing up of the plan and there is sufficient support among internal and external stakeholders.

Effect: The proposals for improving quality, as laid down in the plan, have been arrived at in **consultations** with the participation bodies (teachers and students), internal monitors, and, where relevant, after consultations with external stakeholders. Management and the participation bodies will jointly ensure the **broad-based involvement** of the community of the research university or university of applied sciences and will agree on which bodies inside and outside their institutes will be involved in the creation of their plan.

The participation bodies are **sufficiently** involved, as fully-fledged partners, with the creation of the plan, and the plan shows that the sufficient involvement of the participation bodies is safeguarded during the realisation of the policy. **Facilitating participation bodies** enables them to fulfil their roles effectively.

The participation bodies have given their **consent** to the plan. The Supervisory Board has also approved the plan.

Criterion 3

The proposals in the plan are realistic in the light of the proposed use of the instruments and resources, and of the institute's organisation and processes.

Effect: The institute has adequately translated its plan into **concrete policy actions and processes** that provide a reasoned contribution to improving quality. The internal and, where

relevant, external stakeholders regard the proposals as **achievable and feasible**, considering the financial context of the institute and its vision and policies.

The institute is able to demonstrate that it is monitoring the progress of the agreements and the attainment of its objectives, and is modifying its proposals where necessary. To this end, it shows what existing and new, if applicable, **monitoring processes** it is applying and how it is involving internal and external stakeholders.

Plan assessment rules

Assessment on each criterion: <i>The panel provides an assessment on each criterion on the scale:</i>
Complies: the institute complies with the criterion. Does not comply: the institute does not comply with the criterion.
Final assessment rules on institute:
Positive: complies with all criteria. Negative: does not comply with one or more criteria.
Recommendations:
The panel can make recommendations for improvements in relation to each criterion.

A.2 Assessment in 2022

In 2022, there will be an assessment by the NVAO of what the plan has achieved up to that time. The annual report for the year 2021 will be used for the assessment, as will a reflection by the participation bodies appended to the annual report. No additional documents will be requested. In principle, this assessment will not involve any visits to the institute. The criteria for this assessment will be:

Criterion 1

The institute has made sufficient progress in realising its proposals, bearing in mind the efforts that have been made and how it has dealt with unforeseen circumstances.

Effect: The assessment will concentrate on whether sufficient progress has been made in **realising** the agreed proposals up to the year 2021. The NVAO will take the institute's response to any unforeseen circumstances into consideration in its assessment. The NVAO will also consider any **measures** that have been taken in order to strengthen or modify the plan. The **reflection by the participation bodies** on the realisation of the plan up to that point will be considered by the NVAO in determining whether this criterion has been complied with.

Criterion 2

The participation bodies and other relevant stakeholders have been sufficiently involved during the implementation of the plan.

Effect: The policy of the institute encourages everyone involved to contribute to the **dialogue** during the implementation of the plan on the realisation of the proposals and the related aims. The participation bodies are **sufficiently** involved during the implementation of the policy, including with the monitoring of and modifications to policy actions and processes. The **reflection by the participation bodies** on the involvement of stakeholders and the facilitation of the participation bodies will be considered by the NVAO in determining whether this criterion has been complied with.

2022 assessment rules

<p>Assessment on each criterion: <i>The NVAO provides an assessment on each criterion on the scale:</i></p>
<p>Complies: the institute complies with the criterion. Does not comply: the institute does not comply with the criterion.</p>
<p>Final assessment rules on institute:</p>
<p>Positive: complies with all criteria. Negative: does not comply with one or more criteria.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>
<p>The NVAO can make recommendations for improvements in relation to each criterion.</p>

A.3 Evaluation

The realisation of the plan of an institute with no ITK is evaluated six years after its initial assessment. In the case of institutes with an ITK that have applied for another one, the evaluation is generally part of the next ITK cycle. This means that the evaluations of institutes' plans do not take place at the same time. Some institutes will have a new ITK in 2023, and others not until early 2026.

Account will be taken during the evaluations of the when the assessment was carried out. Like the assessment of the plans, the evaluation involves a panel and a visit to the institute in question. The evaluation will involve the use of existing documents - in this case, annual reports for 2022 and later (the most recent in particular) and, as with the 2022 assessment, a reflection by the participation bodies. The criteria for the evaluation are:

Criterion 1

Up to 2024, the institute has sufficiently realised its proposals, bearing in mind the efforts that have been made and how it has dealt with unforeseen circumstances.

Effect: The assessment will concentrate on the **realisation** of the agreed proposals.

The panel will take the institute's response to any unforeseen circumstances into consideration in its evaluation. The panel will also consider any **measures** that have been taken in order to strengthen, improve, or modify the plan, in line with expectations by students, teachers, or other stakeholders.

The **reflection by the participation bodies** on the realisation of the plan will be considered by the panel in determining whether this criterion has been complied with.

Criterion 2

The participation bodies and other relevant stakeholders have been sufficiently involved during the implementation of the plan.

Effect: The policy of the institute encourages everyone involved to contribute to the **dialogue** during the implementation of the plan on the proposed expenditure of the revenues from the student loan system and the related aims. The participation bodies are **sufficiently** involved during the implementation of the policy, including with the monitoring of and modifications to policy actions and processes.

The **reflection by the participation bodies** on the involvement of stakeholders and the facilitation of the participation bodies will be considered by the panel in determining whether this criterion has been complied with.

Plan evaluation rules

Assessment on each criterion: <i>The panel provides an assessment on each criterion on the scale:</i>
Complies: the institute complies with the criterion. Does not comply: the institute does not comply with the criterion.
Evaluation rules on institute:
Positive: complies with all criteria. Negative: does not comply with one or more criteria.
Recommendations:
The panel can make recommendations for improvements in relation to each criterion.

B. Plan assessment and evaluation process

The assessment of the plan and the evaluation of its realisation may be carried out in their own right or in the context of an ITK. Even if they are carried out in the context of the ITK, they remain separate and are presented in their own reports.

At each assessment moment, the NVAO board will issue separate recommendations for each institute to the minister.

B.1 Assessment of plan: 'separate' or as 'trail' in combination with ITK

The separate assessment of the plan requires of the panel that it familiarises itself with the institute's existing vision and ambitions. The panel will also have to acquire an understanding of the organisational structure (including relevant decentralisation within the institute) and the concomitant management structure, the way in which quality assurance is embedded, and attitudes towards the participation bodies. Understanding these processes in the institute is important in order to be able to assess the plan according to the criteria listed in this protocol.

In the case of institutes that take part in an ITK, the assessment of the plan can be carried out as a 'trail', alongside the other trails that form part of an ITK (see ITK framework). In an ITK, the panel acquires an understanding at institute level of the aforementioned processes, which means that the assessment of the plan can be less of a burden for the institute. As already stated, the assessment of the plan is a separate matter, resulting in a separate opinion and report.

In some cases, the assessment of the plan will be carried out in addition to a recently held ITK. Here, the original ITK panel (or part thereof) will assess the plan. The assessment will have the character of a trail that is carried out separately. In order to distinguish it from anything else, we refer to it as an 'additional trail'. In its judgement, the panel may refer to findings from the ITK, but produce a separate view and report about the plan.

B.2 Timetable

The timetable is determined by the agreements that have been made with the minister.

1 April 2020

The **assessment of the creation of the plans** must have resulted in recommendations by the NVAO to the minister, for every institute by 1 April 2020. Institutes need time to prepare their plans and to coordinate matters internally. This means the assessments can start from the autumn of 2018.

For the purposes of scheduling the assessments, this means that the NVAO (in consultation with the umbrella organisations if necessary):

- enters into discussions with every institute that has not applied for an ITK about scheduling a separate assessment of their plans in 2019 or inclusion of the assessment of the plans in an ITK assessment in 2019 that has yet to be applied for;
- contacts institutes that have had or will have had an ITK in 2019 about scheduling an additional trail;
- contacts institutes for which an ITK is scheduled in late 2018 or 2019 about the possibility of combining plan assessment processes and their ITK;
- enters into discussions with institutes for which an ITK is scheduled in 2019 about the possibility of bring their ITK forward, so that the plan assessment process and the ITK can be combined, or about a separate assessment in 2019.

The minister will enter into discussions with institutes whose plans have been assessed as insufficient by the NVAO (after the recommendations by the panel and after the arguments of both sides have been heard, see H). If the minister then adopts the recommendations by the

NVAO, the institutes in question will have the opportunity to submit a new plan within twelve months. The NVAO will then assess the new plan within twelve months on the basis of the same criteria drawn up before the plan was assessed.

Autumn 2020

The progress of the realisation of the plans will be monitored at institute level. At the same time, parties will wish to see what quality agreements mean from a national perspective for improving the quality of education. For that reason, the NVAO will create a **national picture** from the year 2020 of the current state of play regarding quality agreements. The picture will be based on the plans and on the initial period of their implementation. The NVAO will not request any additional information from the institutes for this purpose. The form that the national picture will take will be discussed with the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the VSNU, the ISO, and the LSVb. They will also be invited to give their comments on a draft version.

Autumn 2022

In 2022, an **assessment** of the realisation of the plans by the NVAO is due to take place. It will base its assessments on the 2021 annual report of the institutes in question in which they take stock of the progress they have made. A reflection by the participation bodies will be added to the annual reports. This concerns a reflection by the participation bodies on what the plans have achieved at that point, the involvement of stakeholders and the degree to which the participation bodies have been able to play their part. The 2021 annual reports and the reflections will form the basis for the assessments by the NVAO.

If the assessments of these documents gives rise to it, the NVAO will request a further discussion with the institutes in question. If this does not clarify matters, or if there are other reasons for further investigation, the NVAO may ask the panel that carried out the assessments of the plans to conduct an additional investigation.

If the 2022 assessments reveal that insufficient progress has been made in fulfilling the plans, the minister will hold discussions with the institutes involved - said institutes will then have twelve months to show that they are indeed making enough progress. The NVAO will then carry out further assessments in the autumn of 2023, based on the reflections by the relevant institutes themselves (first presented by the Executive Board to the Supervisory Board) and their participation bodies, to see whether sufficient progress has been made.

Autumn 2022

On the basis of the 2022 assessments, the NVAO will draw up a **national picture** of the current state of play regarding the quality agreements. For this sector-level picture, the NVAO will not request any additional information from the institutes. The form that the national picture will take will be discussed (as with the national picture in 2020) with the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the VSNU, the ISO, and the LSVb. They will also be invited to give their comments on a draft version.

2023 - 2026

The **evaluation** of what has been achieved by the plans at the end forms, in principle, part of the next ITK cycle process, in the case of institutes that take part in it. The evaluations of the plans of institutes that do not take part in the ITK are held six years after their original assessment. This means that the evaluations of institutes' plans do not take place at the same time. Some institutes will have a new ITK in 2023, and others not until early 2026.

The evaluation is, like the assessment of the plans, a process that involves a panel and a visit to the institute in question.

The evaluation will involve the use of existing documents - annual reports of the relevant institute (the most recent in particular) and a reflection by the participation bodies.

B.3 The plan for using revenues from the student loan system

In their plans for using revenues from the student loan system, the institutes include their proposed expenditure (proposals) for the six agreed themes for improving the quality of education. They also set out in their plans the aims they would like to achieve by 2024, and they formulate what progress they would like to have made by 2021 in realising their proposals. Proposals and aims may apply to the entire institute, but also to certain parts of it or to specific

groups of students. For each of the six themes, the institutes will describe either the proposals and the related aims they seek to achieve in respect of each theme using the revenues from the student loan system, or why they have decided not to allocate any of the resources to a particular theme.

The institutes will describe in explicit terms their justification for their choices in relation to their broader educational proposals, vision, history, and context; this can include their long-term budgetary developments. The institutes will include in their plans a long-term budget that provides information on the areas to which the institutes propose to spend the revenues from the student loan system.

The institutes will also demonstrate in their plans the involvement of internal stakeholders in the drawing up of the plans and the support among internal and external stakeholders.

Each institute's plan on how to use the revenues from the student loan system can be incorporated into a new institutional plan, but it could also be appended to an existing one, for example.

For the assessment by the panel, the institutes will structure their plans around the three criteria, or add instructions for readers.

B.4 Submitting an application

The NVAO and the institutes will reach binding agreements regarding the date of submission. In principle, the application files must be submitted eight weeks before the visit.

Institutes submit their application file for having their plans assessed to webaanvraag@nvaio.net. The NVAO receives ten copies of the application file by post. See 'plan' above for a description of the application file.

B.5 Composition of panel

The NVAO will appoint the panel that carries out the assessments. In the event that an assessment is included in an ITK process, the ITK panel will be the one that carries out the assessment. Account will be taken of this when the composition of the panel is being determined. Institutes may notify the NVAO of any misgivings they have about the composition of the panel within two weeks. The panel will be confirmed after consultations with the institutes.

The assessment experts will be independent of the institute (there must have been no direct or indirect links with the institute in question for at least five years that could lead to a conflict of interest), will be recognised authorities in the field of administration or the development of higher education, be audit experts, or represent the social field. Panel members will sign a statement of impartiality before carrying out assessments.

The panel will jointly cover the following areas of expertise:

- administration;
- higher education, preferably including developments outside the Netherlands;
- expertise relating to the structure and effectiveness of quality assurance systems;
- student representative;
- representative from the social or professional field.

The panel will consist of no more than five members, including a student member, and will be assisted by a secretary and process coordinator from the NVAO. A panel member with administrative expertise will act as chairman. The NVAO will seek to appoint to every panel a member with experience of participation bodies. The panel will reach its judgements amicably. Each different perspective of quality that is represented on the panels, including that of students, will be treated with equal respect. The panels will seek to reach a consensus.

The NVAO will aim to appoint several panels for institutes that have their plans assessed separately (or in addition to an ITK), each of which will visit multiple institutes.

The NVAO will put every panel member on a training course or give them a briefing specifically aimed at assessing the plans on how to use the revenues from the student loan system.

B.6 On-site visits

On-site visits always form part of the assessment and evaluation of the plans. During their visit, the panel will talk with at least the current and possible previous participation bodies, teachers and students, the board of the institute, and the Supervisory Board. The panel will determine how the talks are to be arranged in consultation with the institute. At the end of their visit, the chairman of the panel will give summarised feedback to the institute. The definitive findings will be included in the report containing the recommendations.

When the assessment of a plan has been carried out after an institute has secured an ITK in the second round (additional trail), then the same procedure will be followed as described above.

When the assessment of the plan forms part of the ITK (trail), the assessment will be carried out as a trail during the in-depth visit (see description of ITK process in 2016 accreditation framework). In principle, the panel will hold discussions with each of the bodies referred to above. However, the panel can, in combination with the ITK, take account of previous discussions with any of the said bodies. At the end of the in-depth visit, the chairman of the panel will also give feedback specifically on the assessment of the plan.

B.7 Reports

In the case of the plan assessment and evaluation, the secretary will draw up a report of the recommendations of no more than six pages, following the visits to the institutes.

The report will contain a summary of the findings and deliberations by the panel on which their opinions are based.

The heart of the report will contain, for each criterion, the factually substantiated findings by the panel, its deliberations, its opinion, and any recommendations. Each of the effects for each criterion (in bold) will feature in the reports. The panel will base its reasoning on the application file, the discussions, and findings after studying the relevant material.

The reports will start with a brief and concise summary, aimed at a broad-based readership. The reports will conclude with opinions for each standard. The appendix will contain the summary by the panel and brief CVs of the panel members, the method used by the panel, the dates and programmes of the on-site visits (with the names and functions of the discussion partners and an overview of the material studied).

The chairman will adopt the draft reports after each of the panel members has given their agreement to the content thereof. The institute will receive the draft report and will have two weeks in which to correct any factual inaccuracies. The panel will process the institute's response, after which the chairman will adopt the definitive report after the panel members have all agreed to it, and present it to the NVAO.

For the assessments in 2022, the NVAO will draw up a report for each institute, using the 2021 annual reports and the reflections by the participation bodies. The reports will start with a brief and concise summary, aimed at a broad-based readership. The reports will conclude with opinions for each standard. The institute will receive the draft report and will have two weeks in which to correct any factual inaccuracies. The NVAO will process the institute's response, and then adopt the definitive report.

B.8 Judgement by NVAO

During the assessment and evaluation of the plan, the NVAO forms its own independent judgement about the advisory report, looking at its consistency, the panel's methods, procedural requirements, and its reasoning and considerations, in order to determine that the panel's recommendations are properly underpinned and imitable and that the formation of the panel's opinion has taken place in a consistent manner.

The NVAO may invite the chairman of the panel (and other panel members) to give a more detailed explanation. The NVAO will inform the institute about any such discussions and may also invite the institute for a discussion. Institutes may themselves state that they would like a discussion or more detailed explanation in advance of the NVAO forming a judgement.

On the basis of the advisory report by the panel and any additional explanatory information, the NVAO will produce its own reasoned independent judgement. Based on the judgements for each criterion, the judgement will either be positive or negative. The institute will have the opportunity to respond to factual inaccuracies in the judgement.

The judgement of the NVAO serves as a recommendation for the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The minister will decide whether to allocate revenues from the student loan system. The decision of the minister may be appealed and objected to.

B.9 Notification

The NVAO publishes its recommendations and the advisory report by the panel on its website after the decision by the minister.

NVAO

The judgements arrived at by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), independently and meticulously, strengthen the quality culture of institutes of higher education. Higher education study programmes are accredited on the basis of the judgements by the NVAO, which means students receive diplomas worthy of the name. The NVAO is binational and operates at an international level.

NVAO. Confidence in quality

