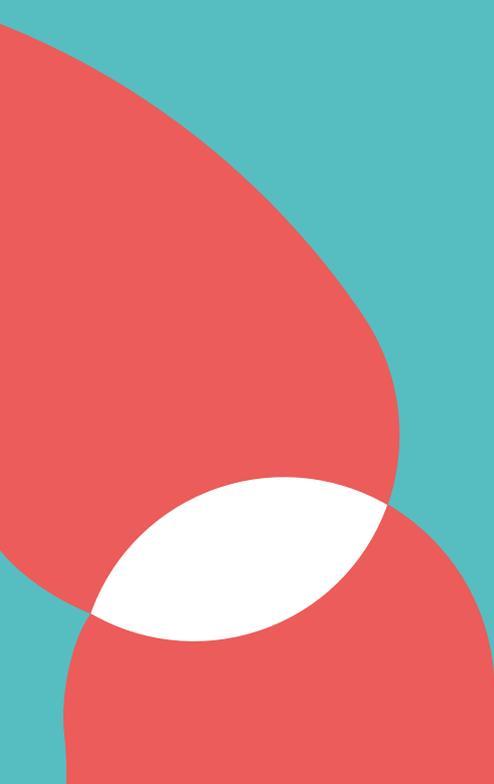




NVAO  NETHERLANDS

# TEMPORARY PROCEDURE FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION

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## Introduction

On account of the corona virus containment measures implemented by the government, NVAO had temporarily suspended the initial accreditation assessments, in view of the fact that these circumstances preclude any site visits and interviews with staff involved in the programmes. As a result, several universities are being faced with one or more initial accreditation procedures that have been adjourned. NVAO regards this situation as undesirable, considering the statutory timeframes applicable to such procedures and the interests of the applying universities.

For that reason, NVAO has made some (temporary) adjustments to the initial accreditation procedure, in line with the requirements incumbent upon such assessments as stated in legislation and the relevant accreditation framework. The modified procedure safeguards the quality assurance of new programmes, whilst facilitating progress in the processing of applications that have already been submitted, in order to foster completion of such procedures within the statutory timeframe or to ensure that the desired commencement date of a new programme can be realised. These modifications are compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines.

The modifications are of a temporary nature – in principle remaining in force until 1 September 2020 – and apply to a limited category of applications. For the moment, applications submitted after 1 March 2020 do not qualify for the temporary arrangement. Following consultations with the umbrella organisations concerned, the Board of NVAO will decide whether or not programmes will (continue to) qualify for the temporary arrangement and what order of priority will be observed in the processing of submitted applications. First and foremost, NVAO aims to accommodate tertiary institutions that intend to launch a new programme on 1 September 2020. NVAO has discussed the modifications with the stakeholders involved and with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The modifications are detailed in the Temporary Procedure for Initial Accreditation.

Essentially, the modifications entail the possibility of replacing the preparatory consultation of the panel in person and the site visit to the university with meetings via digital means. In addition, NVAO has created the option of having applications within the same discipline assessed by a core panel (a single panel to assess several applications), supported by a limited number of remote meetings. A prerequisite for both options is that the information dossier pertaining to the new programme must be complete to such an extent as to warrant immediate processing. Another important precondition is that panel members (who have already been recruited) must be available, able, and willing to conduct an assessment in accordance with this modified procedure.

The arrangement will reduce throughput times by 50 per cent, provided that the preconditions are satisfied.

The quality of the initial accreditation procedure is not compromised. The assessment of the plans for a new programme is in the hands of a panel of peers. Students must have certainty that a programme assessed by NVAO meets the relevant quality requirements. NVAO will monitor the findings of those involved in these modified assessments. An evaluation meeting will be scheduled once the first assessments have been conducted. The experience gained in these assessments will be taken into account in any future developments of the accreditation system.

# 1 Prioritisation

The applications for initial accreditation that are now being processed by NVAO can be divided into three categories:

- A. Postponed applications, for which a panel has been appointed and for which a site visit has been scheduled, and where the date falls in the period in which the restrictive measures took effect;
- B. Applications submitted prior to 1 March 2020, for which a panel has not yet been appointed and/or for which a site visit has not yet been scheduled;
- C. Applications submitted after 1 March 2020.

Precedence will be given to programmes whose intended commencement date is 1 September 2020; category A programmes will be given priority over category B programmes. NVAO will analyse applications submitted in these categories and present a prioritised list to the umbrella organisations of the higher education institutions (the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, and the Platform of Recognised Private Training Institutions). The umbrella organisations have the opportunity to submit their views. Subsequently, NVAO will endorse the list.

When compiling the list, NVAO will also include applications from institutions that do not fall under one of the umbrella organisations, yet do fall within category A or B. All applications in categories A and B are subject to the proviso that if convening a panel / mobilising the panel that has already been appointed should turn out to be impossible by 1 June 2020, NVAO may as yet decide to continue processing the application in accordance with the regular procedure.

In principle, category C applications do not qualify for the temporary procedure. Such applications will be processed on the basis of the regular initial accreditation procedure.

## 2 Procedure

### 2.1 Panel composition

The requirements regarding panel composition are identical to those in regular initial accreditation procedures. One of the factors affecting the panel composition is the availability of panel members in these times. The NVAO process coordinator will schedule the meeting day, in consultation with the panel.

#### *Core panel*

By virtue of this arrangement, NVAO may convene a core panel, conceivably supplemented by substantive experts. A core panel will process multiple similar applications or applications within the same discipline. NVAO has experience in working with core panels. The panel and the process coordinator will establish the approach to warrant a proper and substantive assessment. The tertiary institution will be closely involved in the substantiation of this approach. The core panel will take separate decisions for each programme and issue recommendations tailored to each specific programme.

### 2.2 Preparations

#### *Completeness check*

In initial accreditation procedures for which a panel has not yet been appointed and/or for which a site visit has not yet been scheduled (category B), the NVAO process coordinator will check the information dossier for completeness. This completeness check in temporary procedures is thorough and in accordance with the requirements set out in the accreditation framework<sup>1</sup>.

Only minor addenda may be provided in order to complete the dossier. The inability to submit such addenda at short notice will disqualify the application for the temporary procedure; the application will subsequently be processed by means of the regular initial accreditation procedure. A decision to this effect will be taken by NVAO. The completeness check will take a maximum of one week.

#### *Information dossier analysis*

Once the information dossier has been found to be complete, the panel will embark on its perusal. In this temporary procedure, the panel will follow the usual preparations, involving the reading and analysis of the information dossier. The panel members will record their findings on the analysis form on which there is dedicated space for further justification and substantiation of their judgments. In the temporary procedure, even more emphasis will be placed on the written analyses of the panel members. The analysis of the information dossier will take approximately three weeks. The initial impressions may prompt a limited request for additional information.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 3.1 of the framework states: "The plans must have been elaborated to a sufficient extent in order to give the panel a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes of the entire programme, the set-up of the curriculum, the learning environment, the learning assessment, and the staff team that is going to teach the programme. With respect to the first 60 ECs of the programme, these aspects must have been elaborated in detail. Paragraph 3.4.1 provides further details regarding the information dossier to be compiled in initial accreditation procedures."

Paragraph 3.4.1 states: "The initial accreditation of new programmes involves an ex-ante assessment. The information dossier and the appendices provide the panel with a clear picture of the intended learning outcomes for the entire programme, the set-up of the curriculum, the draft teaching and examination regulations, the learning environment, the learning assessment, and the composition of the staff team that is going to teach the programme. With respect to the first 60 ECs of the programme, full information on the content of the programme and the learning assessment must be available in draft form. In addition, tests must have been elaborated for several components. The programme must provide insight into the methods it intends to employ to assess achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the end of the curriculum."

### *Preparatory consultation*

Approximately one week after submission of the analyses by the panel members, a remote preparatory internal panel consultation will be held, during which the panel will discuss the information dossier and the underlying documents. The process coordinator will explain the assessment framework, the assessment procedure, and the attitude expected of the panel members during the interviews. Furthermore, the process coordinator will ensure calibration within the panel by discussing the interpretation of the standards, the conclusions, and the assessment rules.

The preparatory panel consultation will take place approximately one week before the remote site visit and, in principle, via digital means of communication. The panel members are free to determine their approach in consultation with the NVAO process coordinator. The completed analysis forms constitute the basis for the preparatory consultation. During the preparatory consultation, the panel members will determine key questions to be considered during the remote site visit, in order to arrive at a conclusion.

The panel will conduct the assessment in accordance with the relevant stipulations of the framework. The assessment involves a peer review, in the sense that judgments are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. Among other things, this means that the panel approach will be based on trust and the principles of the programme, and that the panel members will engage in an open dialogue with those involved. The *ex ante* nature of the assessment will remain entirely intact. In their preparatory consultation, the panel members will also discuss the approach to be adopted during the remote site visit.

The preparatory consultation may result in a limited request for additional information.

The panel may find that a remote site visit will not suffice to arrive at a conclusion regarding the application. In such cases, the panel will advise the Board of NVAO on the necessity of a site visit in person. A panel may issue such a recommendation on the following grounds:

- the need for more substantive questions requiring an in-depth interview, or
- the need for the assessment of services and/or facilities essential to the programme.

Panels will exercise reticence in requesting a site visit in person. The Board of NVAO will decide on the matter on the basis of the panel report. Adoption of the panel report means that the application no longer qualifies for this temporary initial accreditation procedure. However, the application will be processed once the possibility of a site visit in person becomes possible within government guidelines. The university is free to withdraw its application and re-submit at a later date.

If the panel is confident that a remote site visit can warrant the continuation of the assessment, the key questions will be forwarded to the university. In addition, the panel will indicate which discussion partners it would like to interview during the remote site visit.

## 2.3 Inspection

The remote site visit will take place digitally and will be structured in a manner that enables the panel to conduct a thorough assessment. At a minimum, the inspection will involve an interview with (delegates from) the programme management, the development team / staff team, and the board of examiners. Furthermore, the assessment will usually comprise an interview with the relevant professional field. The panel may choose to conduct this interview on a date other than that of the remote site visit, and may decide to delegate this interview to specific panel members.

As occasion arises, the panel may request additional discussion partners be included in the remote site visit. In such cases, the programme will be informed accordingly ahead of time. The programme may also suggest discussion partners to be added to the remote site visit. The panel will honour such suggestions whenever possible and may request adjustments in the purview of the formation of reliable judgments.

## 2.4 Judgement

As in regular initial accreditation procedures, the information dossier, the preparatory consultation, and the remote site visit constitute the elements underpinning panel conclusions. The panel judgments are formed on a peer-by-peer basis. The judgment will do justice to the various perspectives of quality that are represented on the panel, amongst which is the student perspective. The panel will aim for consensus.

At the end of the remote site visit, the panel chair will provide feedback to the programme.

If the panel decides on a negative recommendation regarding the application, the programme will be entitled to re-submit its application by means of the regular initial accreditation procedure.

## 2.5 Reporting

The report produced in this procedure will be based on a format to be provided by NVAO. In a concise advisory report, the panel will summarise the findings and considerations that have resulted in the scores awarded. The standards and assessment rules in the relevant framework are leading in this report. The panel secretary will submit the first draft of the report a week and a half after the remote site visit. The panel members will respond to the draft advisory report within several days.

The advisory report will underpin the accreditation decision made by NVAO. NVAO will publish the accreditation decision and the advisory report.

The draft advisory report will be endorsed by the panel chair, following approval by the panel members.

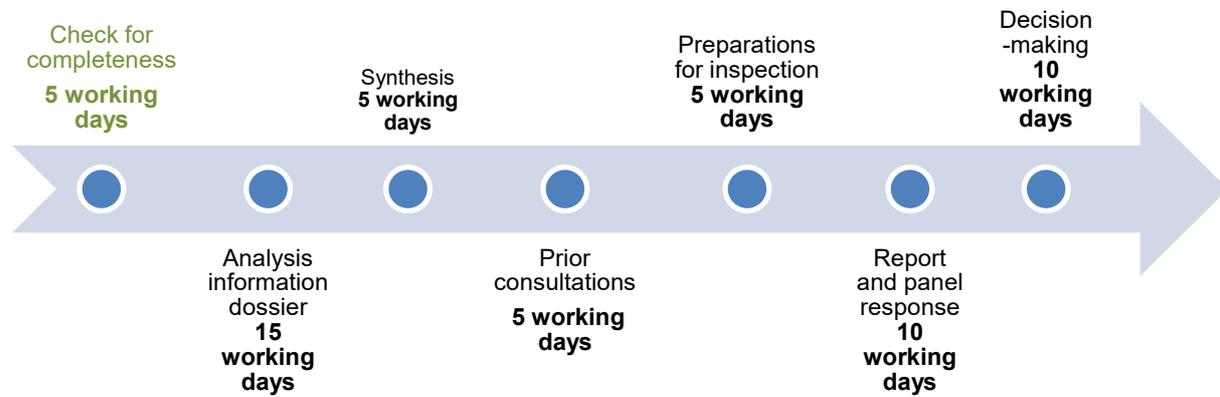
The draft advisory report will be forwarded to the tertiary institution in order to rectify any possible factual inaccuracies.

## 2.6 Decision-making

The Executive Board of NVAO will take a decision on the application on the basis of the panel recommendations, in the manner as indicated in the framework.

### 3 Timeline

The indicative process timeline in the temporary initial accreditation arrangement (without panel convention) can be schematised as follows:



The working days indicate the time required to complete the step.

At any time during the temporary procedure, a university or programme may request that its application be transferred to a regular procedure. This does not require re-submission of the dossier.

In principle, the same panel will continue to process the application, provided that its members are willing and available. However, such a transfer may entail a change in panel composition. In such cases, NVAO will take a new decision regarding the appointment of panel members.

