

Substantive Change Report
by Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
(NVAO)

Register Committee

Ref. C70

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-11-12

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Decision of: 12/11/2021

Report received on: 15/10/2021

Agency registered since: 04/03/2008

Last external review report: 21/11/2017

Registration until: 30/09/2022

Absented themselves from decision-making: Eltjo Bazen

- Attachments:
1. [Substantive Change Report Quality Agreements, 15/10/2021](#)
 2. [Substantive Change Report Assessment Framework for the HE Accreditation System, 03/11/2021](#)
 3. [Substantive Change Report Assessment of Transnational Education, 03/11/2021](#)
 4. [Eligibility Clarification Minutes, 13/10/2021](#)

1. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 15/10/2021.
2. The Register Committee noted that since its last review in November 2017, NVAO has introduced the following changes in its external quality assurance activities:
 - A) a change in the scope of the activity *assessment of Quality Agreements* (activity offered in the Netherlands);
 - B) update of the *assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system* in September 2018 (the Netherlands);
 - C) development of *the assessment of transnational education* in April 2018 (activity offered outside the Netherlands)
3. Given that most of these changes became effective in 2018 already, the Committee underlined that NVAO should have submitted a change report immediately after the new or revised methodologies were adopted.

A. Assessment of Quality Agreements (the Netherlands)

4. While the activity *assessment of Quality Agreements* was initially an activity within the scope of the ESG, the Register Committee understood

that the procedure has now transformed into an audit of the revenues received by universities as part of the student loan system.

5. Considering the change of scope from the external quality assurance of teaching and learning to an institutional financial audit, the Register Committee agreed that the activity is no longer within the scope of ESG. The activity will be therefore classified as historic on the list of activities within the scope of the ESG from the agency's register entry.
6. **The Register Committee further underlines that NVAO is expected to ensure a clear and transparent separation between its activities within the scope of the ESG and the 'assessment of Quality Agreements', which is no longer covered by registration on EQAR (see Annex 2 of EQAR's Use and Interpretation of the ESG¹).**

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B. Update of the *assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system*

7. With the adoption of the Dutch Accreditation Act 2018 (Wet accreditatie op maat), NVAO has adjusted its accreditation framework to anchor it into the new legislation. The new assessment framework has been established following consultations with the umbrella organisations for publicly funded and private universities, universities of applied sciences, quality assessment agencies, student organisations, employers' organisations and with input from other parties involved in educational practice (ESG 2.2).
8. The Register Committee noted that the standards used by NVAO have remained largely the same. A specific provision has been included in the programme assessment framework where programmes must justify the choice of language and demonstrate that professors are capable of teaching in such a language (ESG 2.1).
9. The Committee learned that within the new accreditation framework all programmes are divided into visitation groups (ESG 2.3). NVAO determines, on the basis of the assessment report, whether a programme will retain its accreditation. In the event of shortcomings that can be remedied within two years, NVAO will award conditional accreditation (ESG 2.5).
10. Reports based on the new accreditation framework contain a summary that is aimed at a wide audience, indicating strengths and other areas for improvement for each standard (ESG 2.6).
11. **The Register Committee took note of the revised assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands.**

¹<https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

C. Assessment of Transnational Education

12. The Register Committee understood that the procedure for the assessment of transnational education concern study programmes offered by the Dutch higher education institutions abroad that have already been accredited in the Netherlands. The aspects that differ for such a study programme generally refer to the staff, the location, the services, and the examining board.
13. The assessment of the transnational education will be based on the programme that is being provided and has been accredited in the Netherlands, while also considering the differences and specifics of the programme abroad. The Committee noted that the processes are predefined and published, and so are the results of the assessment (ESG 2.3, ESG 2.6).
14. Considering that the procedure is an expansion of an existing procedures for the accreditation or initial accreditation, that has been reviewed against the ESG (as part of NVAO's renewal of registration), the Register Committee had no concerns on the ESG compliance and therefore took note of this change.

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EQAR Substantive Change Report

Agency #1	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
Agency acronym	NVAO
Expiry date #1	01/10/2022
Contact #1	Luut Kroes
Phone #1	+31611467951
Email #1	l.kroes@nvaio.net
Other organisations?	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed?	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed?	No
C. Changes in EQA activities	2. Substantive changes carried out to one or several existing external QA activities (e.g. changes to their methodology, criteria or procedures)
Description new/changed	<p>In the Netherlands NVAO started with the the preparation for the assessment of the Quality Agreements, 2018. At that time the idea was to do the assessment within the scope of the ESG. When the assessment was worked out together with out Ministry and the HEI's, the procedure became an audit. And no longer within the scope of the ESG. The conclusion is that these activities should be removed from the list of the activities of the NVAO Netherlands that are within the scope of ESG. The QA's are not within the scope of the ESG.</p>
2. Changed EQA activity	
1	Quality Agreements (in the Netherlands)
ESG 2.1	-
ESG 2.2	-
ESG 2.3	

1	-
ESG 2.5	-
D. Activity outside the scope of the ESG	No

EQAR Substantive Change Report

Agency #1	The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
Agency acronym	NVAO
Expiry date #1	30/09/2022
Contact #1	Luut Kroes
Phone #1	+31611467951
Email #1	l.kroes@nvao.net
Other organisations?	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed?	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed?	No
C. Changes in EQA activities	2. Substantive changes carried out to one or several existing external QA activities (e.g. changes to their methodology, criteria or procedures)

Description new/changed

The Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands that came into force in September 2016 marked an important step towards the assessment of the quality of higher education programmes and institutions in the Netherlands based on trust in the existing high quality of Dutch higher education.

With the adoption of the “Wet accreditatie op maat” (Dutch Accreditation Act 2018), the principle of trust in the existing high quality of Dutch higher education has been explicitly anchored in legislation. To align the accreditation framework with the new act, a limited number of adjustments have been made to the September 2016 framework.

The standards to be met by programmes and institutions have remained virtually unchanged. The framework 2018 aims to endorse staff and student ownership of the programmes and to reduce the administrative burden of the accreditation process for programmes and institutions. At the same time, the system must be sufficiently robust to safeguard the quality of programmes and institutions, be able to enforce improvement, and render the quality offered visible to students, employers, and society.

The framework takes both trust and selfconfidence as its points of departure. Existing documents will suffice to demonstrate the quality, expertise and knowledge of those who substantiate the education provided. This means that institutions and programmes will not be required to provide more than is outlined in this framework.

Further simplification has been achieved by opting for...

... binary, undifferentiated conclusions. The panels will assess a programme as either (conditionally) positive or negative. NVAO will then decide whether or not to accredit a programme. The assessment reports outline the strengths and points for improvement of the programmes; however, NVAO will not take these into consideration in its accreditation decision.

In the same vein lies the introduction of accreditation for an indefinite period of time for existing programmes. Every six years, NVAO determines, on the basis of an assessment report, whether a programme will retain its accreditation. In the event of shortcomings that can be remedied within two years, NVAO will award conditional accreditation.

In line with the societal debate on the added value of providing English language teaching in higher education programmes, a specific provision has been included in the programme assessment framework to safeguard the quality of programmes being taught in a language other than Dutch. This provision stipulates that the programme must justify its choice of language and that its teachers must be capable of teaching in such language. This also applies to programmes that bear a foreign language name.

The framework expressly calls for attention to be paid to quality culture and its embedding, always in interconnection with quality assurance tools. The framework is based on respect for the autonomy of the institutions that bear primary responsibility for their quality. Most important changes in the NVAO framework (from 2016 to 2018) regarding the...

... procedure accreditation (the assessment of existing programmes)

1.1 Structure of the framework

1.2 Standards

The standards of the new framework are almost the same as those of the 2016 framework. An addition is the motivation of foreign-language education and a foreign-language course name in standard 2 in the limited framework and standard 4 and 6 in the extended framework. Teachers should be capable to teach in this language. This is not new but made more explicit.

1.3 Decision rules

1.4 Conditions

1.6 Visitation groups and deadlines

All programs are divided into visitation groups. Accreditation of existing programmes no longer has an expiration date, but instead all programs in a visitation group have the same return date for next report in six years.

1.7 Panels and secretaries

Stricter rules with regard to independence apply to panel members and secretaries.

1.8 Preparation of the panel for visitations

The secretary during visitations is also responsible for the preparation of the panel and the process monitoring of the assessment. The new framework contains more rules regarding preparation.

1.9 Study of final projects

The panel studies a selection of final projects to assess the system of testing and the learning outcomes achieved. The framework provides clear instructions for this. The panel studies the final projects of at least 15 graduates of the program.

1.10 Assessment and reporting

2. Changed EQA activity

1	See 1
ESG 2.1	See 1
ESG 2.2	See 1
ESG 2.3	
1	https://www.nvao.net/files/attachments/.139/Assessment_Framework_for_the_Higher_Education_Accreditation_System_of_the_Netherlands_2018.pdf
ESG 2.4	See 1
ESG 2.5	See 1
D. Activity outside the scope of the ESG	No
File #1	Assessment_Framework_for_the_Higher_Education_Accreditation_System_of_the_Netherlands_2018.pdf (569 KB)
File #2	Changes_assessment_framework_2016_-_2018-20211101-rh.pdf (100 KB)

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Expiry date #1	30/09/2022
Contact #1	Luut Kroes
Phone #1	+31611467951
Email #1	l.kroes@nvao.net
Other organisations?	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed?	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed?	No
C. Changes in EQA activities	1. One or several new external QA activities were introduced

Description new/changed

This procedure is intended for higher education institutions considering submitting an application for the assessment of an annexe abroad which will be providing an existing programme that has already been accredited in the Netherlands.

The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science will decide on the application and solicit advice to this end from NVAO and the Education Inspectorate.

The protocol we use sets out the requirements pertaining to an NVAO assessment procedure that is not covered by the NVAO assessment framework. The document also outlines the method to be adopted in the procedure.

Points of departure

The point of departure in transnational education is that the programme to be provided abroad is largely identical to the accredited programme being provided in the Netherlands. Elements that generally do not entirely correspond relate to the staff, the location, the services, and the examining board.

The Self-evaluation Report (SER) of the existing programme can serve as the basis for the assessment, updated and supplemented as outlined below. These documents will hereinafter be referred to as SER-TNE.

In terms of the assessment, a distinction is made between initial assessments and re-assessments. Initial assessments and re-assessments are both carried out by NVAO. The protocol at hand pertains to initial assessments (initial application). A re-assessment will tie in with the regular assessment (re-accreditation) of the programme, with explicit attention being focused on the annexe abroad.

Applications...

... are assessed on the basis of the regular NVAO assessment frameworks. The assessment of the intended learning outcomes and the curriculum content will be based on the programme that is being provided and has been accredited in the Netherlands. Any differences (albeit minimal) must be specified in the application and will be covered in the assessment.

The application must state the similarities and differences with the Dutch programme and the Dutch site.

Following the assessment by the panel and the decision-making by NVAO, NVAO will submit an advice to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The advice to the Minister will be either positive or negative.

NVAO may include substantive recommendations and conditions in its advice. Inability of NVAO to form a judgement will result in a negative advice to the Minister.

1. New EQA activity:	
1	Assessment of Transnational Education
Focus	study programmes or higher education institutions
ESG 2.1	This activity is an expansion of our existing procedures for the accreditation or initial accreditation, the assesment is based on the same assessment regulations as the "normal" assessment activities.
ESG 2.2	This activity is an expansion of our existing procedures for the accreditation or initial accreditation, the assesment is based on the same assessment regulations as the "normal" assessment activities.
ESG 2.3	

1	https://www.nvao.net/en/procedures/the-netherlands/transnational-education-programmes-abroad
ESG 2.3	not applicable
ESG 2.4	same as in our other activities
ESG 2.5	same as in our other activities
ESG 2.6	
1	https://www.nvao.net/en/decisions/educations
ESG 2.7	same as in our other activities
ESG 3.4/ESG 3.6	same as in our other activities
D. Activity outside the scope of the ESG	No
File #1	Protocol_for_the_Assessment_of_Transnational_Education.pdf (90 KB)

Application by Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) for Renewal of Registration

Minutes of Telephone Conversation

Register Committee

Ref. A119
Date 2021-10-27
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Date of the conversation:	13/10/2021
Representative of NVAO:	Luut Kroes, Axel Aerden
Representative of EQAR:	Melinda Szabo

1. NVAO has submitted on 27/09/2021 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) with a targeted review.
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on the eligibility of the application and NVAO's activities within the scope of the ESG, EQAR contacted NVAO via telephone to clarify the matters below.
3. NVAO agreed to clarify the matters by means of a telephone conversation.
4. The agency carries out in addition to the accreditation of joint programmes, the activity *European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes*. The agency agreed that the activity should be included to Terms of Reference, as part of the list of activities within the scope of the ESG.
5. The programme accreditation procedure for universities and universities of applied sciences and arts (statutory/registered) is different to the programme accreditation procedure of other statutory registered higher education institution in Flanders. This differentiation is also made in the case of initial vs regular programme accreditation. The distinction should therefore be considered and the activities included separately in the Terms of Reference.
6. With the exception of *assessments of special (quality) features for programmes and institutions*, all other procedures carried out and coordinated by NVAO have distinct procedures in the Netherlands to those carried out and Flanders (Belgium Flemish Speaking Community). The activities should therefore be covered individually in each case.
7. The activity *assessment of quality agreements in the Netherlands* was described by NVAO in its application form as an activity outside the scope of the ESG. The agency explained that while the assessment was initially designed as a quality assurance activity (see NVAO Change report of 30/04/2019¹), the nature of the activity changed from a peer

¹<https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=37>

review into much more strict assessment of regulation and auditing and did no longer address aspects related to teaching and learning of higher education but focused mainly on the assessment of the revenues from the student loan system. The agency therefore wishes to place the activity outside the scope of the ESG. The agency further added that a change report will be submitted to EQAR to explain the change.

8. The activity *formally validating the domain/discipline specific learning outcomes for each qualification in Flemish higher education* is not an external QA activity in itself and it does not concern individual higher education institutions or programmes. NVAO explained that it provides a formal recognition/validation of proposals jointly developed by institutions that award or want to award a certain type of qualification.

Register Committee

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