

Approval of the Application
by Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and
Flanders (NVAO)
for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
 2-3 March 2023

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Ver. 1.0
Date 2023-03-13
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Application of:	2021-09-27	
Agency registered since:	2008-03-04	
External review report of:	2022-09-05	Submitted: 2022-11-11
Type of review:	Targeted	
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)	
Review panel members:	Liv Teresa Muth, Pdraig Walsh, Tadej Tuma	
Decision of:	2023-03-03	
Registration until:	2027-09-30	
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Eltjo Bazen	
Attachments:	1. Minuted eligibility clarification with NVAO, 2021-13-10 2. External Review Report, 2022-09-05 (separate file) 3. Minuted clarification with the Review Panel, 2023-02-10	

1. The application of 2021-09-27 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2021-11-12 having considered clarification received from NVAO on 2021-10-13.
3. The Register Committee considered the targeted external review report of 2022-09-05 on the compliance of NVAO with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel on 2023-02-10.

Analysis:

5. In considering NVAO's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:

- *(Initial) Accreditation of joint programmes*
- *European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes*
- *Programme accreditation in Flanders for universities and universities of applied sciences and arts (statutory/registered)*
- *Initial programme accreditation in Flanders for universities and universities of applied sciences and arts (statutory/registered)*
- *Programme accreditation in Flanders for other-statutory registered higher education institution*
- *Initial programme accreditation in Flanders for other-statutory registered higher education institutions*
- *Institutional reviews in Flanders (*)*
- *Assessments of special (quality) features for programmes and institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders*
- *Initial institutional accreditation in the Netherlands (**)*
- *Institutional audits in the Netherlands (**)*
- *Programme accreditation in the Netherlands, including the Caribbean islands Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba (**)*
- *Initial programme accreditation in the Netherlands, including the Caribbean islands Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba*
- *Institutional and programme assessments in the Caribbean islands of Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten (so-called Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands)*
- *Combined institutional/programme assessments in Luxembourg*
- *Assessment of transnational education programmes (**)*

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6. The following activities are not external QA activities within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application inclusion on the Register:

- *Assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands*
- *Assessment of the quality of 'Training Schools' (Aspirant-Opleidingsscholen)*
- *Development and assessment of Training Schools ('Samen Opleiden en Professionaliseren - Kibrahacha') in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao*
- *Developing a guide for the assessment of training on the job ('Werkplekleren')*

7. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on NVAO's level of compliance with the ESG.

8. The Register Committee noted that since the last review, the principal development introduced by NVAO was the institutional review process in Belgium – Flemish Community (FL)*. The Committee further noted that the agency has also updated its assessment framework in the Netherlands and

introduced an assessment protocol for transnational education (the activities marked with (**)). These activities were thus subject of the targeted review.

9. **The Register Committee noted that NVAO is considering introducing a system of institutional accreditation in the Netherlands for all recognised institutions (public and private) in higher education. The Committee underlined that NVAO is expected to report such substantial changes, including any piloting of the new procedure, immediately after the design phase by submitting a substantive change report form with further information.**¹

10. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance

11. The Register Committee noted that a protocol for the assessment of transnational education in the Netherlands (NL) came into effect in 2018. The Committee however could not find any information on whether NVAO-NL has addressed the standards of ESG Part 1 (ESG 1.1-ESG 1.10) in its new protocol and has therefore sought further clarification from the panel.

12. The panel explained (see clarification letter) that a transnational education programme may be provided on the condition that the programme abroad is equal to the one accredited in the Netherlands. This may only concern programmes that have already been accredited in the Netherlands. Given this condition, the review panel explained that the study programmes abroad follow the same accreditation protocol as the programmes accredited in the Netherlands.

13. The Register Committee understands that ESG Part 1 has been verified by the panel for the renewed 2018 NVAO-NL assessment framework and noted that a clear link between the institution's internal and the NVAO's external quality assurance procedures was ensured.

14. Having considered the clarification provided, the Register Committee can now follow the panel's conclusion of compliance with the standards 2.1.

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

15. The Register Committee noted that NVAO-NL may modify a recommendation for a positive outcome in a panel report, although it has never so far questioned this. The Committee was unclear on the situations that may lead to a deviation from the outcome of a panel's report and whether such deviations are documented.

16. In its clarification response (of 10/02/2023) the review panel explained that NVAO-NL may occasionally seek additional information from panels and in a limited number of cases, and after due deliberation may expand

¹See EQAR change report policy and form at:
<https://www.eqar.eu/register/reporting-and-renewal/>

conditions or deviate in a minor sense from the panel's advice. Such changes may be done by NVAO-NL to reduce the subjectivity of reports and ensure the consistency of recommendations as well as of the final outcome. Deviations from the final recommendation of the panel have not happened yet, but according to the agency's procedure these changes are documented in the final published decision by NVAO-NL.

17. Having considered the clarification provided, the Register Committee can now follow the panel's conclusion of compliance with the standard 2.5.

ESG 2.6 – Reporting

18. In its previous renewal decision, the Register Committee stressed the delay in NVAO's publication of reports and noted issues related to the readability of reports.

19. The panel's findings show that NVAO has since its last review introduced instructions and templates for reporting and that the readability of submitted initial assessment reports is also checked by NVAO. The panel further confirmed that the publication of reports was done without any more significant delays, but suggested setting up an automatic uploading system of NVAO-NL reports (as it is done for NVAO-FL).

20. The Register Committee welcomed the improvements in the agency's reporting and concurred with the panel's conclusion that NVAO now complies with the standard 2.6.

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

21. In its Terms of Reference for the review the Register Committee asked the panel to consider how the agency clearly separates between activities that are within and outside the scope of the ESG, in particular considering the 'Assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands' and the 'Assessment of the quality of Training Schools'. While the panel concludes that there is a clear separation between NVAO's activities within and outside the scope of the ESG, the Committee could not find the argumentation to support the panel's conclusion and has therefore sought further information.

22. In its response (see minuted conversation), the panel explained that the separation between the agency's activities that are within and outside the scope of the ESG did not pose any concern.

23. Considering the *Assessment of quality agreements in the Netherlands* the panel stated that the activity does not address the teaching and learning aspects within higher education and that the focus of the assessment is on how institutions (plan to) spend the so-called study advance grants. The panel added that the agency's protocol or description does not misrepresent the activity in any way (i.e. referring to ESG or EQAR registration).

24. Considering *the evaluation procedure for teacher training schools*, the panel clarified that the activity does not address or evaluate the teaching and learning in higher education, but it assesses the collaboration between

schools for primary and secondary education and institutions for teacher training.

25. Having considered the clarification provided, the Register Committee can now follow the panel's conclusion of compliance with the standard 3.1.

26. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

27. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that NVAO demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

Standard	Previous decision (2017-11-16)	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion (2023-03-03)
2.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.6	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.2	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.5	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.6	Compliance	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.7	Compliance	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

28. NVAO therefore complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

29. The Register Committee therefore renewed NVAO's inclusion on the Register. NVAO's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 2027-09-30².

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² Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

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

Register Committee

Minutes of Telephone Conversation

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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 in the 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.

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Clarification provided by the Panel

Register Committee

Date of the conversation:	2023-02-10
Panel members:	Padraig Walsh, Tadej Tuma
Representative of EQAR:	Melinda Szabo

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1. NVAO has submitted on 2021-09-27 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 2022-11-11, NVAO submitted the external review panel's report of 2022-09-05.
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on NVAO' compliance with the ESG, EQAR contacted the Panel to clarify the matter(s) below.
 - the assessment of transnational education in April 2018 (activity offered outside the Netherlands) and its compliance with ESG 2.1-ESG 2.7;
 - possible cases where NVAO-NL may modify a panel's recommendation for a positive outcome of a panel report (ESG 2.5);
 - how the agency endeavours to separate between activities that are within and outside the scope of the ESG, in particular considering the 'assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands' (ESG 3.1).

ESG 2.1 – ESG 2.7 Assessment of Transnational Education

3. The protocol for the assessment of transnational education came into effect in 2018, following a change in the Dutch Higher Education Act. This change allowed all Dutch higher education institutions to provide an entire programme at a foreign campus (before 25% of the programme had to be on Dutch soil) on the condition that the programme abroad is equal to the one accredited in the Netherlands.
4. Given this condition, the review panel explained that the programmes abroad follow the same accreditation protocol as in the Netherlands. The site-visit interviews might follow personalised questions depending on the programme, but the same criteria and approach as home based programmes is employed.
5. NVAO has developed a separate protocol for the quality assessment of programmes abroad to address the (component of the) advice to be provided to the Minister as required by the decree i.e., NVAO does not

take a decision. In addition to soliciting advice from NVAO, the Minister will also solicit advice from the Education Inspectorate.

6. In terms of decision making, the panel issues a judgment for the transnational programme as a whole: 'meets the standard', 'partially meets the standard' or 'does not meet the standard' (as for any other Dutch programmes). Based on this, the NVAO Board advises the Ministry of Education about the programme as offered on a campus abroad. Following receipt of the recommendations, the Minister will decide on the application.

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ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

7. For existing programmes, NVAO-NL usually receives reports which contain a positive or conditional positive outcome. Panels can make recommendations or propose different conditions, which are subjected to a check by NVAO-NL. NVAO-NL occasionally asks for additional information from panels and in a limited number of cases, and after due deliberation may expand conditions or deviate in a minor sense from the panel's advice.
8. Such changes may be done by NVAO-NL to reduce the subjectivity of reports and ensure the consistency of recommendations as well as the final outcome.
9. Situation where a final ruling deviates in a major sense from the panel advice are rather exceptional and according to the agency's procedure this is well documented in the final decision by NVAO-NL.
10. The Chair and Secretary of the NVAO Review Panel confirmed that in its final decision NVAO-NL's includes the reasoning for any changes and possible deviations it makes to the panel reports.

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

11. The activity *Assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands* was initially defined as an activity within the scope of the ESG and afterwards transformed into an audit of the revenues received by universities as part of the student loan system. The rapporteurs asked the review panel to clarify how NVAO ensures a clear and transparent separation between its activities within the scope of the ESG and the 'assessment of Quality Agreements'.
12. The Chair and Secretary explained that the separation between the agency's activities that are within and outside the scope of the ESG did not pose any concern. The *'Assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands'* is presented clearly on the agency's website, does not address teaching and learning and does not refer to the ESG standards or EQAR-registration.
13. The Chair and Secretary added that although the protocol for the *'Assessment of Quality Agreements in the Netherlands'* is closely aligned to the NVAO accreditation framework 2016 it does not deal

directly with teaching and learning in higher education as such. The focus of the assessment is on how institutions (plan to) spend the so-called study advance grants.

14. Similarly, the evaluation procedure for teacher training schools is an activity outside the scope of the ESG. It does not address teaching and learning in higher education but the collaboration between schools for primary and secondary education and institutions for teacher training (e.g., universities and universities of applied sciences).

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