

# Overview

Quality Assurance System  
in Higher Education

# The Netherlands

Second edition (2018)



**NIAD-QE**

National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education

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First edition printed and published in March 2011

Second edition printed and published in March 2018

1-29-1 Gakuen-Nishimachi, Kodaira, Tokyo 187-8587 Japan

<https://www.niad.ac.jp>



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**NIAD-QE**  
**March 2018**

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## Introduction

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In addition to its core activities of university evaluation, awarding of degrees and research activities, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) is working closely with domestic and overseas quality assurance agencies, including those with advanced higher education systems and close ties with Japan, to gain the trust of the international community in Japanese higher education and promote international collaboration among higher education institutions (HEIs).

As each country possesses different political, societal, cultural and language elements, the structure of quality assurance systems for higher education also differ. In building relationships and realising effective cooperation that transcend such barriers, *mutual understanding* must be enhanced among cooperating organisations by exchanging accurate information on their respective quality assurance and higher education systems.

In this context, the International Affairs Division of the NIAD-QE has developed the Information Package as a means for publishing comprehensive information on higher education and quality assurance systems in Japan and other countries. We have so far compiled information on Japan, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, France, Korea, China and Germany.

Higher education institutions in the Netherlands mainly consist of *universities*, which focus on academic study, and *universities of applied sciences*, which focus on education for professionals. Introduction of the bachelor/master/doctor structure in 2002 has increased the Dutch authorities' awareness of the importance of quality in higher education. The current quality assurance system was subsequently established and is being implemented mainly by quality assurance agencies such as the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Inspectorate of Education.

The NIAD-QE has compiled recent trends in quality assurance in the Netherlands and produced an “**Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education: The Netherlands (second edition)**” in both English and Japanese. We hope that this information will be useful in the development of higher education cooperation between the Netherlands and Japan.

We would like to thank everyone who gave us useful comments and suggestions for completing this document, including valuable direct advice from Nuffic and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), both institutions cooperating with the NIAD-QE. We would especially like to express our special thanks to Ms. Marijke Blom-Westrik, Senior Credential Evaluator at the Nuffic and Dr. Mark Frederiks, International Policy Coordinator at the NVAO, for their contribution to the production of this document.

This Overview document is also available from our website:

<https://www.niad.ac.jp/english/cqa/information.html>

March 2018

National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education

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## Map of the Netherlands



Source : <http://www.freemap.jp/item/europe/netherlands.html>

## I . Basic information on the Netherlands

Name of country	Kingdom of the Netherlands	
Capital city	Amsterdam	
Seat of government	The Hague	
National language	Dutch	
Population*	17,085,000 (2016)	
Nominal GDP*	76,990,000,000 USD (2016)	
Nominal GDP per capita*	45,210 USD (2016)	
Public spending on education as a percentage of total government spending**	All levels of education 11.2% (OECD average 11.3%) (2014)	HE level 3.7% (OECD average 3.1%)
Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP**	All levels of education 5.4% (OECD average 5.2%) (2014)	HE level 1.7% (OECD average 1.5%)
Spending per student at higher education level**	19,159.0 USD (2014)	
Public spending on higher education per student**	18,942.5 USD (2014)	
Tertiary education entry rate**	36% (2015)	
Organisation of education system	Refer to II-2. Dutch education system, p. 7.	
Language of instruction***	The language in higher education institutions is Dutch, but under the influence of the Bologna process more and more study programmes are being offered in English.	
Cycle of academic year***	In higher education, the academic year begins on 1 <sup>st</sup> September and ends on 31 <sup>st</sup> August of the following year.	

*Source:*

\* Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Overview of Kingdom of the Netherlands" : <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/netherlands/data.html>

\*\* OECD (2015) : *Education at a Glance 2017*

\*\*\* Education system the Netherlands: *Nuffic Country Module (2015)*, p.6

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## II. The higher education system

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### 1 History of higher education in the Netherlands

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The Netherlands has three main types of higher education institutions<sup>1</sup>. Universities, which are also called WO institutions (*WO-Wetenschappelijk onderwijs* in Dutch), aim at providing academic education, conducting research, and offering knowledge to society, and focus on the independent practice of research-oriented work in a professional academic setting. They essentially educate students in academic study and research, although many study programmes also have a professional component. Universities of applied sciences, which are called HBO institutions (*HBO-Hoger Beroepsonderwijs* in Dutch), are more practically oriented, fostering students directly for specific careers. Their study programmes mainly focus on the practical application of knowledge. In addition, there are legal bodies for higher education called RPHO institutions (*RPHO-Rechtspersonen hoger onderwijs* in Dutch), which are legally authorised private institutions but do not receive any funds from the government. These institutions typically provide bachelor's programmes, but they can also provide associate degree programmes or master's programmes. Quite a number of these institutions also provide secondary vocational education as well. Overall, there are 18 publicly-funded universities including one Open University, 36 publicly-funded universities of applied sciences and 81 unfunded institutions that are legal bodies for higher education.

#### 1) University sector

The history of the Dutch university sector dates back to 1575, when the University of Leiden was founded as a reward for its citizens' persistence in fighting the Spaniards during the Eighty Years' War with Spain. The establishment of other universities followed in subsequent years, e.g., in Groningen (1614) and Utrecht (1636). Over the centuries, additional universities were founded, partly as an explicit economic government policy to further activity in certain disadvantaged regions. The founding of the University of Twente in 1961 and the Maastricht University in 1976 are two examples. Churches founded some institutes of higher education, such as the protestant Free University in Amsterdam and the Roman Catholic Radboud University in Nijmegen. These universities take part in the national accreditation system and are funded by the government.

Until the 1970s, the university sector was left more or less on its own by the government. It appeared to function according to its own purposes and little policy attention was directed towards it. However, this changed rather dramatically and quickly. At the end of the 1970s, the circumstances surrounding higher education were not very bright. The most important reform and retrenchment operations designed and implemented from the end of the 1970s were: (1) restructuring of university education through the introduction of a so-called two-tier structure in which university education was structured in a first tier of four years leading to a bachelor's degree and a post-graduate second tier leading to a master's

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<sup>1</sup> See the diagram of the Dutch education system on p. 7.

degree; (2) two retrenchment operations for the university sector that resulted in the closure of several departments and a reshuffling in terms of programmes offered; and (3) introduction of a system of conditional funding of research. These ad hoc restructuring operations lasted until the mid-1980s when a new approach regarding the steering and functioning of the Dutch higher education system was introduced.

## 2) The HBO-sector

The sector of universities of applied sciences (the HBO-sector) can also be traced back quite some time, but circumstances of its development were very different from the university sector. Most of the older institutions have their roots in the 19th century and evolved out of the guilds. The first legal framework was provided by the 1919 Domestic Science and Technical Education Act,<sup>2</sup> which differentiated, among others, among primary, secondary domestic and technical education. In 1968, higher vocational education was introduced as a separate type of education with the passing by the Parliament of the Secondary Education Act (SEA),<sup>3</sup> which codified all forms of education between primary and university education. A characteristic of the SEA and the way in which the Ministry of Education and Science used it was a detailed regulation of institutional affairs, such as the amount of internships and the professional fields of institutions. Thus, the Acts severely restricted the further development of the HBO-sector, a sector that, among other things, was extremely diverse and fragmented in those days.

The period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s can be characterised as one of substantial growth and systemic development. The number of students rose rapidly in higher education, creating the beginning of budgetary pressures that were to dominate the 1980s. In line with developments in other countries, the Dutch HBO-sector was considered ideal to take care of this increasing student body, as it: (1) was considerably cheaper than the university sector; (2) catered to part-time education; and (3) provided the kind of orientation perceived as beneficial to the growth of the Dutch economy. Expansion of the HBO-sector, however, also gave rise to discussions about both the internal structure of the sector and its relationship with the university sector.

In 1983, the then Minister of Education and Science proposed in the white paper *Scale enlargement, Task-reallocation and Concentration (STC)* major restructuring of the HBO-sector with far-reaching consequences for the structure and functioning of the Dutch higher education system. The main objectives of the STC restructuring were: (1) a considerable increase in institutional size through institutional mergers; (2) an increase in institutional autonomy regarding the use of resources, personnel policy and the structuring of educational processes; and (3) an increase in institutional efficiency through economies of scale. The Minister envisaged that, as a result of the implementation of the STC-operation, a limited number of multidisciplinary, medium-sized institutions with considerable autonomy would arise. The outcomes of the merger processes, however, surpassed all expectations. By July 1987 the original 350-plus institutions had merged into 85 institutions, and more than half of them developed to multi-purpose institutions. Some of the latter turned out to be larger merged institutions. Thus, in terms of structure, the Dutch higher education institutional landscape had changed

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<sup>2</sup> Domestic Science and Technical Education Act: Nijverheidsonderwijswet

<sup>3</sup> Secondary Education Act (SEA): Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs

dramatically. In terms of function, increased autonomy was to be attained through the implementation of the new governmental steering philosophy as well as through the framework provided by the new HBO-Act<sup>4</sup> (1986) that finally took HBO beyond the realm of secondary education and placed it formally in higher education, thereby formalising the already existing binary structure.

### 3) Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)<sup>5</sup>

The Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) entered into force in August 1993. The WHW replaced the University Act (WVO),<sup>6</sup> the Higher Professional Education Act (WHBO),<sup>7</sup> the Open University Act (WOU),<sup>8</sup> and numerous other regulations governing higher education and research. The Higher Education and Research Act contains general provisions applicable to the entire higher education sector in the Netherlands. It also includes:

- provisions that apply specifically to authorised higher education institutions in the Netherlands (these relate to the structure of courses and institutions);
- parameters relating to teaching structure, such as entry requirements with regard to previous learning, and the academic workload of students;
- regulations concerning examinations, students, participation in decision making, staff, planning and funding; and
- rules for cooperation between institutions.

The Act redefined the administrative relationship between the government and higher education and research institutions. Previous legislation significantly provided for *ex-ante* regulation and planning, assigning a central role to government for the higher education sector.

The new Act has its origins in the 1985 policy document *Autonomy and Quality in Higher Education* (HOAK-document<sup>9</sup>), which sets out the philosophy of hands-off government and autonomous educational institutions operating in a flexible way. The underlying principle is to give institutions greater freedom of policy within the parameters laid down by government, not as an end in itself but as a means of enabling the higher education system to respond more effectively and decisively to the changing needs of society.

The concept of autonomy is one of the fundamental ideas of the Higher Education and Research Act. The idea involves *ex-ante* control by the government being replaced by *ex post* control of a more general nature. At the same time, the Act stressed that, despite decentralisation, the government remains responsible for the macro-efficiency of the system. That is, the government is mandated to apply *selective control*, intervening only when necessary.

The administrative relationship between government and institutions of higher education and research, as defined in the Act, is based on the following principles:

<sup>4</sup> Wet op het hoger beroepsonderwijs (HBO-Act)

<sup>5</sup> Wet op Hoger onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk onderzoek (WHW)

<sup>6</sup> Wet op het wetenschappelijk onderwijs (WVO)

<sup>7</sup> Wet op het hoger beroepsonderwijs (WHBO)

<sup>8</sup> Wet op de Open Universiteit (WOU)

<sup>9</sup> Hoger onderwijs: Autonomie en Kwaliteit (HOAK-document)

- the government should intervene to prevent undesirable consequences only where self-management by the institutions is likely to have unacceptable results;
- government intervention should primarily take the form of remedying imperfections in the system *ex post*;
- the instruments at the government's disposal should be characterised by a minimum of detailed regulation; and
- the institutions must lay down norms to ensure legal certainty, reasonableness and proper administration.

The Act allowed the institutions to compose curricula by themselves. They are responsible in the first instance for maintaining quality, providing an adequate range of teaching and research programmes and ensuring access to education. Quality control is exercised by the institutions themselves, by external experts and, on behalf of the government, by the Inspectorate of Education.<sup>10</sup> In principle, the government assesses on an *ex post* basis only whether funds have been deployed effectively and whether the intended results have been achieved. If major shortcomings are identified, the institutions are informed accordingly. If discrepancies between ideal and reality persist, notably in the area of quality, the government has the option, with due regard to the proper procedures, of using coercive powers backed up by sanctions.

Following its enactment in 1993, the WHW has been amended frequently to deal with pressing issues in the higher education system in the Netherlands. One of the significant amendments was made in 2010, designed to improve the quality of higher education and the treatment of students as well as teaching and administrative staff members. The Act confronts issues including the legal protection of students, access to higher education, simplification of administrative processes for enrolment and de-registration, a clear separation between governing and supervisory bodies and the role of examining boards. In addition, the Act regulated the introduction of selection of enrolments for higher education institutions, fee exemption of students who have important posts in the school board or student union and increase in involvement of the Education Committee (*Opleidingscommissies* in Dutch) in the internal quality assurance system of each institution, such as giving advice on teaching and examination.

## 2 Overview of institutions

In the Netherlands, there are three types of higher education institutions: universities (WO), universities of applied sciences (HBO) and legal bodies for higher education (RPHO).

All universities and all universities of applied sciences are funded and allowed to confer their degrees by the government. Meanwhile, legal bodies for higher education are not eligible for government funding and are not able to confer their degrees unless they apply for the right and are authorised by the government.

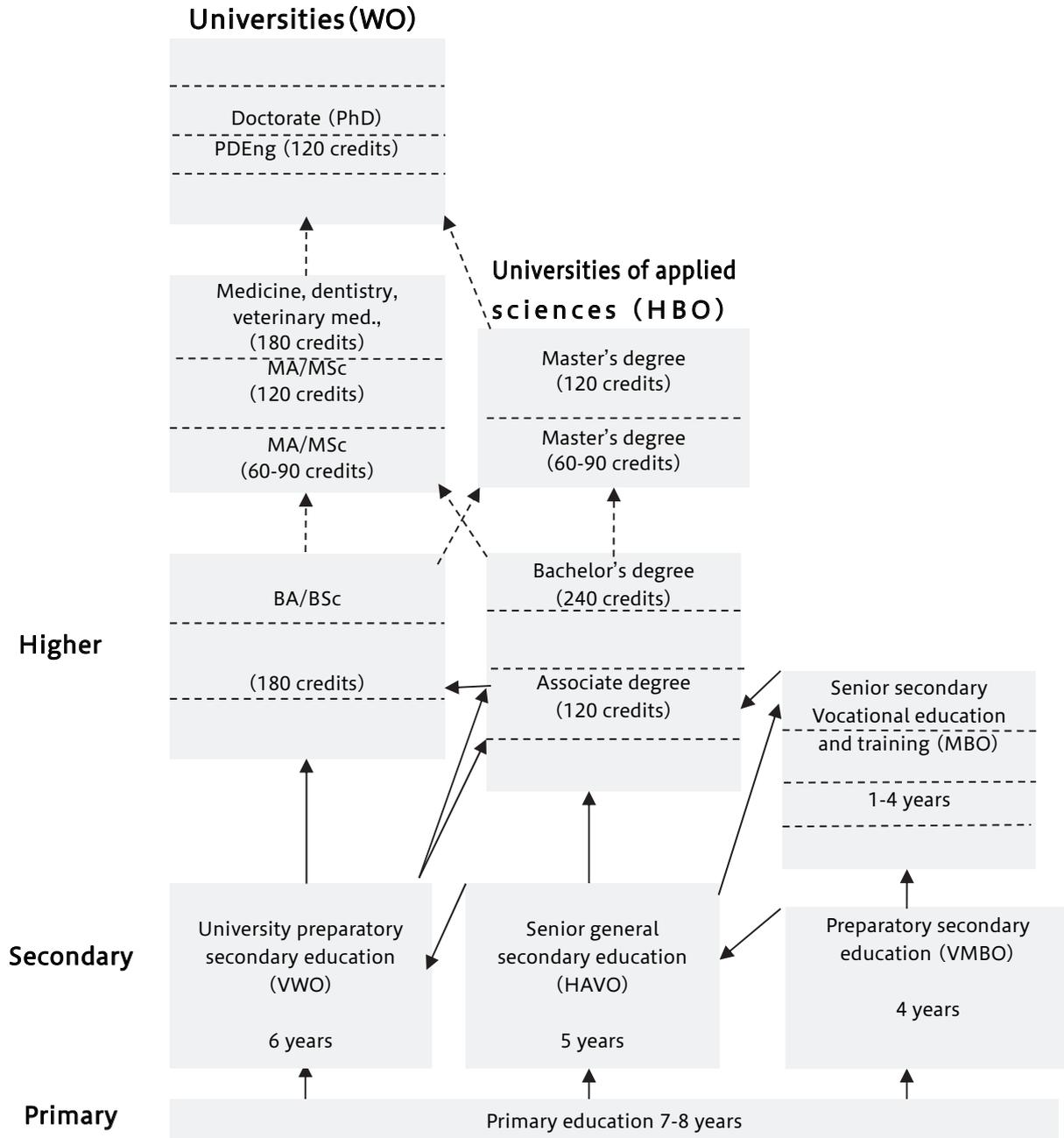
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<sup>10</sup> See p. 23 for further detail.

All universities and all universities of applied sciences offer study programmes for which tuition fees are stipulated by law. On the other hand, legal bodies for higher education are not bound by official tuition fees, but may determine their tuition fees themselves.

### 1) Dutch education system<sup>11</sup>

- A dotted line indicates division of students' year of study.
- A solid arrow ( —————> ) indicates a right to access.
- A dotted arrow ( - - - - -> ) indicates that some form of selection or bridging requirement may be applied.



Source: Nuffic website

<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/the-dutch-higher-education-system.pdf/view>

<sup>11</sup> Most master's degrees offered by universities require 60–90 credits. Those in engineering, mathematics, natural sciences and agriculture require 120 credits, and those in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and pharmacy require 180 credits. In addition, some universities offer 2-year professional doctorate programmes in engineering (PDEng). Meanwhile, most master's degrees offered by universities of applied sciences require 60–120 credits. In addition to those in the chart above, programmes in architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture require 240 credits.

## 2) Overview of higher education institutions

### Universities/ Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs

Universities in the Netherlands are institutions aiming to provide academic education, conduct research and offer knowledge to society. Research-oriented education is divided into three study cycles consisting of bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. Bachelor's and master's programmes allow students to transfer their credits through the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). However, ECTS credits are not generally linked to doctoral programmes.

There are 18 universities including one Open University in the Netherlands. They are all funded by the government. Universities vary in size, with enrolments ranging from 6,000 to 30,000. Overall, there are approximately 258,000 university students in the Netherlands.

Many of the universities provide programmes called "*international education*", except for the Maastricht School of Management. In these programmes, advanced courses at post-graduate level are provided and taught in English. These courses are based on work in small, intercultural groups and focus on the exchange of knowledge, facilitated by teachers with extensive work experience in developing countries.

### Universities in the Netherlands (18 universities)

Universities of technology	Delft University of Technology (Technische Universiteit Delft) Eindhoven University of Technology (Technische Universiteit Eindhoven) University of Twente (Universiteit Twente)
University of agriculture and life sciences	Wageningen University and Research Centre (Wageningen University)
Distance teaching university focusing on lifelong learning	Open University in the Netherlands (Open Universiteit Nederland)
Universities with broad-based orientation	Erasmus University Rotterdam (Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam) Leiden University (Universiteit Leiden) Maastricht University (Maastricht University) Radboud University Nijmegen (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen) Tilburg University (Tilburg University) University of Amsterdam (Universiteit van Amsterdam) State University of Groningen (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) Utrecht University (Universiteit Utrecht) Free University Amsterdam (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
Universities of theology	Protestant Theological University (Protestantse Theologische Universiteit) Theological University of Apeldoorn (Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn) Theological University in Kampen (Theologische Universiteit Kampen)
Universities of humanistic	University of Humanistic Studies (University voor Humanistiek)

## Universities' financial resources

The types of financial resources that universities have are mainly divided into the following three flows.

- Government funding
- Support for research projects awarded by Dutch research councils: NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) and KNAW (The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences)
- Support from third parties including public and private entities such as enterprises and the EU, etc.

Under the first flow, government funding, universities are allowed to decide how to use the funds by themselves. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science determines the amount of funds every year. The government's decision regarding the amount of funds distributed to each university depends on the outcomes of their management, which are indicated by their performance as reflected by enrolment and the number of bachelor's or master's degrees conferred and so on. The funds for research activities through the first flow occupy the largest part of the entire government funding and its structural basis. The funding schemes through the second and third flows consist of temporary funds. Moreover, tuition fees are a small part of the teaching-related income of the universities.

## Universities of applied sciences (higher professional education institutions)/Hoger Beroepsonderwijs

The study programmes offered by universities of applied sciences are career-oriented. They mainly focus on education for professionals such as business managers, high school teachers and nurses as well as for several technical professions. Acquiring practical work experience through internships is an integral part of professional study programmes. Currently, there are 36 government-approved universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands. Enrolment ranges from 20,000 to 40,000 students at the institutions of the largest size. Overall, approximately 443,000 students are enrolled in the universities of applied sciences.

The list of universities of applied sciences is given on the website (Vereniging Hogescholen).<sup>12</sup>

In addition to universities and universities of applied sciences, the Netherlands has institutions called *RPHO institutions*, which are mostly privately funded.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/component/content/article/22/364>

### 3) Statistics

#### Number of institutions, students and staff members<sup>13</sup>

	<u>Number of institutions</u>	<u>Number of students</u>	<u>Total number of staff</u>	Academic staff	Support staff
Universities	18 <sup>14</sup>	258,054 <sup>15</sup>	397,000	229,000	168,000
Universities of applied sciences	36	453,354	314,000	184,000	129,000
<u>Total</u>	54	711,408	711,000	413,000	297,000

#### Number of international students (as of 2014–2015)

There are 89,388 international students in universities or universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands. Of them, 56,288 students are from EU countries and EFTA<sup>16</sup> (about 63 %); 22,802 students are from countries other than the EU and the EFTA (about 26 %); another 10,298 students came to the Netherlands through the Erasmus+ programme or with a residence permit for an internship (about 12 %).

## 3 Access to higher education

### 1) Requirements for enrolment in higher education institutions

To apply for research-oriented bachelor's programmes at universities, students are required to have a VWO (the university preparatory secondary education) diploma or to have completed the first year (60 credits) of a bachelor's programme at a university of applied sciences. The minimum requirement to apply for universities of applied sciences is a diploma of senior secondary vocational education (MBO diploma), provided certain conditions are met.

The VWO diploma allows students to apply for bachelor's programmes in universities as well as associate degree's and bachelor's programmes at universities of applied sciences. To apply for either type of programme, pupils must have completed at least one of the subject clusters that fulfil the requirements for the higher education programme in question. In principle, there used to be no selection of new students for programmes in higher education. The programme in which a student would enrol used to be determined mainly by a weighted lottery. However, there was an exception. Some programmes have a limited capacity but many applicants. This occurs primarily in the medical sciences. In this case, selection of new students was practised. In 2017, the Higher Education and

<sup>13</sup> Number of institutions and students are as of 2014–2015 (Number of institutions and students of Universities of applied sciences are as of 2017–2018), total number of staff, academic staff and support staff are as of 2012–2013 (round figures).

<sup>14</sup> The figure includes one Open University.

<sup>15</sup> The figure includes 17,000 students of the Open University.

<sup>16</sup> EFTA (European Free Trade Association) : Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

Research Act (WHW) was amended, changing this situation. Selection of new students is now possible for higher education programmes as a general rule from the academic year 2017. Potential students older than 21 years of age who do not possess one of the qualifications mentioned above can qualify to apply for higher education on the basis of an entrance examination and assessment (recognition of prior learning). In addition, the requirement for the Open University is that applicants be at least 18 years of age.

To apply for all master's programmes, a bachelor's degree in one or more specified disciplines is required. Graduates with a bachelor's degree in the applied arts and sciences may have to complete additional requirements in order to apply for a research-oriented master's degree programme.

Most programmes for international education are provided in English. International students must therefore have sufficient linguistic skills, including speaking, reading and writing. Some programmes have English language requirements that must be met.<sup>17</sup>

## 2) Transfers within higher education

Students can transfer to a different level as well as to a different type of programme in higher education. For example, a student who has completed the first year of a bachelor's programme with a professional orientation (HBO) can apply for a bachelor's programme with an academic orientation (WO). The same scheme can be adopted for the student who wishes to transfer from a WO programme to an HBO programme. Students with an associate degree can apply for the remaining section of a related bachelor's programme with a professional orientation. In principle, bachelor's degree holders are allowed to apply for master's programmes, while master's degrees holders are subsequently allowed to apply for PhD programmes. The transition from HBO bachelors to research masters is only possible after completion of a preparatory course.

# 4 Courses and qualifications

## 1) Overview of courses and qualifications

Due to the adoption of the Bologna process,<sup>18</sup> Dutch universities started the three-cycle structure (bachelors, masters and doctorate) in 2002, and all study programmes now correspond to this structure.

However, the traditional titles—*doctorandus (drs.)*, *ingenieur (ir.)* and *meester (mr.)*—are still being used as equivalent to the titles in the three-cycle structure.

The average length of Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree programmes in

<sup>17</sup> Language requirements for individual programmes or courses are indicated in the database of international courses on the following website ([http://www.studyin.nl/\[English\]](http://www.studyin.nl/[English])).

<sup>18</sup> The Bologna process was set up with a view to harmonising national education systems in the member states and facilitating student and staff mobility. The aim of the Bologna process was to establish a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, with structural uniformity, transparency and quality assurance as key objectives.

universities is three years. BA or BSc degree programmes are research-oriented, giving students a foundation for research in their specified disciplines. Master of Arts (MA) or Master of Science (MSc) degree courses take one to two years to complete, depending on students' academic field.

PhD degree courses leading to doctoral degrees are provided only in universities and require four years of full-time research under the supervision of academic staff. The research conducted in a conventional doctoral degree must be original, accompanied by a dissertation and defended.

Meanwhile, associate degree courses were newly introduced in 2007, at the request of various sectors of industry. The courses of study are two-year degree programmes within the HBO bachelor's degree framework and confer an Associate Degree (AD). In terms of level of education, the AD lies between level 4 in senior secondary vocational education and training (MBO) and a bachelor's degree in universities of applied sciences (HBO).

Until 2008, degrees conferred by universities of applied sciences were simply described as Bachelor or Master. However, they have been conferred as a "Bachelor of Major Course" since 2009. Moreover, HBO can now also award BA and BSc, degrees that could previously only be awarded by research universities. To award degrees, the universities of applied sciences need permission from the NVAO.

### **Types of degrees and requirements for learning hours/credits**

	Universities	Universities of applied sciences
PhD <sup>*1</sup>	4 years	-
Professional Doctorate in Engineering (PDEng) <sup>*2</sup>	2 years (120 ECTS)	-
Master of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine	3 years (180 ECTS)	-
Master (M)	-	1–2 years (60–120 ECTS)
Master of Arts (MA)	1–2 years (60–120 ECTS)	-
Master of Science (MSc)	1–2 years (60–120 ECTS)	-
Bachelor (B)	-	4 years (240 ECTS)
Bachelor of Arts (BA)	3 years (180 ECTS)	-
Bachelor of Science (BSc)	3 years (180 ECTS)	-
Associate Degree (Ad) <sup>*3</sup>	-	2 years (120 ECTS)

\*1 An institution providing international education courses conferring the PhD.

\*2 Professional Doctorate in Engineering

\*3 Associate Degree

## **2) Credit system and assessment system**

Since the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999, a number of changes have occurred in higher education in the Netherlands and throughout Europe. A bachelor/master/doctor structure and a system of credits — the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)<sup>19</sup> — were introduced in

<sup>19</sup> The EU introduced this standardised system for measuring study load as a way to facilitate international mobility. One ECTS credit represents 28 hours of full-time study (including contact hours, reading, independent study and presentation for exams, etc.). The study programme for every academic year consists of 60 ECTS (1,680 hours).

order to promote national and international mobility of students and academic staff, as well as European cooperation in assuring quality. The Netherlands' higher education institutions officially adopted the ECTS system in bachelor's and master's degree programmes in 2002.

The ECTS grading scale has been developed in order to help home institutions translate the grades awarded by host institutions to students who applied for ECTS system. It provides a way of measuring and comparing learning achievements and transferring them from one institution to another.

In the Netherlands, the ECTS provides information on a student's performance abroad in addition to that provided by the host institution's grade. It does not mean to replace the grade itself.

### **The ECTS grading scale and the Dutch grading scale**

ECTS grade	Numerical grade	Description
A	10 <sup>20</sup>	Outstanding
B	9	Very good
C	8	Good
D	7	More than satisfactory
E	6	Satisfactory
FX	5	Almost satisfactory
F	4	Unsatisfactory
	3	Very unsatisfactory
	2	Poor
	1	Very Poor

Source: Nuffic *Education System The Netherlands* (2015) p. 15

### **3) The Dutch Qualifications Framework**

As in many other European countries, the Netherlands has developed a national qualifications framework. The Dutch Qualifications Framework (NLQF)<sup>21</sup> describes the structure of the higher education system of the Netherlands. It indicates the prior education that students are required to have completed before entering higher education institutions, the types of higher education, the general study terms for completion of programmes at the various levels, and how to transfer to higher levels.

<sup>20</sup> The numerical grade of 10 is very rarely given to students.

<sup>21</sup> Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk Hoger Onderwijs (NQLF)

**Summary of Dutch National Qualifications Framework (ECTS credits in the table show the credits required to graduate/complete a programme)**

Admission from	First cycle		Second cycle Level 7	Third cycle Level 8	
	Level 5	Level 6			
MBO/HAVO/VWO*	Associate degree 120 ECTS	Bachelor's degree 240 ECTS (professionally oriented)	Master's degree 60–120 ECTS	Design engineer (standard: 2 years)	Doctorate (standard: 4 years)
VWO	180 ECTS (academically oriented)		60–180 ECTS	Medical specialist (standard: 3–6 years)	

\* MBO: Senior secondary vocational education and training

HAVO: Senior general secondary education

VWO: University preparatory secondary education

**Comparability of NLQF and European qualification framework (EQF)**

The NLQF refers back to the European qualification framework (EQF) to encourage international mobility and the comparability of educational levels in European member states.

EQF	NLQF	Dutch Qualification
8	8	Doctor
7	7	Master
6	6	Bachelor
5	5	Associate Degree
4	4+	VWO
4	4	MBO4/HAVO
3	3	MBO3
2	2	VMBO kb, gl and tl/MBO2
1	1	VMBO bb/MBO1

Source: Nuffic Country Module (2015) p.4

## 4) Curriculum

### Study load

Dutch law (Higher Education and Research Act: WHW) defines the bachelor's degree programme in terms of the number of ECTS credits a student must obtain before the degree can be awarded. It makes a clear distinction between the bachelor's degree awarded by traditional universities and those awarded by universities of applied sciences (HBO). Bachelor's degrees in universities are awarded to students who have obtained 180 ECTS credits, while those in universities of applied sciences require 240 ECTS credits. This is because there is a difference in the secondary education stage. For universities this is at a higher level. Consequently, students at universities of applied sciences need to

obtain more ECTS credits in order to achieve an equivalent level. The emphasis in education at universities of applied sciences, however, is on training for various professions. The minimum number of ECTS credits needed to obtain a master's degree is also prescribed by law: 60 ECTS credits are needed for most master's degree programmes (usually in the humanities, economics, the social sciences and law), and 120 ECTS credits are required for some programmes (mainly in the natural sciences), whereas other programmes vary from 180 ECTS (as in the medical sciences) to 240 ECTS credits.

## 5) Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a document based on a European model that accompanies a person's higher education certificate.<sup>22</sup> Officially, the DS was introduced in all Dutch institutions of higher education as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2006. Currently, the majority of students receive the European version of the DS with their final diploma.

## 5 Responsible authorities and higher education-related bodies

### Government departments

Government departments are responsible for overall public policy for higher education. These include the following:

- Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science): <http://www.minocw.nl/>
- DUO (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs: The Education Executive Agency, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science): <https://duo.nl/particulier/>

### Research councils

- De Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research): <http://www.nwo.nl/>
- Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen KNAW (The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences): <http://www.knaw.nl/>

### Representative organisations

- Vereniging van Universiteiten VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands): <http://www.vsnu.nl/>

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<sup>22</sup> The Diploma Supplement is intended to provide international transparency and facilitate fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates) awarded in Europe. The Diploma Supplement is produced by higher education institutions themselves. This is done according to a template developed jointly by the European Union's Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

- Vereniging Hogescholen (Association of Universities of Applied Sciences):  
<http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/>

### **Quality assurance agencies**

- De Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie:NVAO (The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) <sup>23</sup> :  
<https://www.nvao.net/>
- Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU): <http://www.qanu.nl/>
- Certiked VBI bv (Lloyd's Register Nederland B.V.): <http://www.lloydsregister.nl/nl/>
- Hobéon Certificering bv (Hobéon): <http://www.hobeon.nl/>
- Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA): <http://www.nqa.nl/>
- Evaluatiebureau voor het Hoger Onderwijs (AeQui)
- MusiQuE Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE) : <http://www.musique-qe.eu/>

### **Organisations for promoting and supporting international student mobility**

- Nuffic: <http://www.nuffic.nl/>  
Nuffic is the organisation for internationalisation in education that recognises professions in the Netherlands and abroad, foreign diplomas in the Netherlands and Dutch diplomas abroad.
  - Dutch ENIC/NARIC (Dutch European Network of Information Centres in the European Region/National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (ENIC/NARIC): <http://www.enic-naric.net/netherlands.aspx>  
Dutch ENIC/NARIC provides information on higher education, especially on current issues in international academic and professional mobility, and on procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

## **6 Student organisations**

### **The Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb)** <http://www.lsvb.nl/> (English and Dutch)

The LSVb (The Dutch National Union of Students) was established in 1983. It is a federation consisting of 12 local student unions in the Netherlands. These local unions safeguard the rights of students in their own town and their own university. The LSVb has played the role of ensuring that national and local governments, universities and the DUO (Education Executive Agency) take the interests of students into account. By speaking with members of the Parliament, the Minister of Education and other stakeholders in higher education, the LSVb makes sure that the voices of students are heard. Through these efforts, the LSVb keeps higher education available for all students, maintains and improves quality of education and negotiates tuition fees at an acceptable rate. The LSVb also supports students by providing services for training, information on student housing and free legal support.

<sup>23</sup> The NVAO trains secretaries of panels usually employed by agencies such as QANU, Hobeon and NQA, etc. The secretaries are hired by HEIs and advise them on panel composition and how to conduct external reviews.

## **Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO)** <http://www.iso.nl/> (English and Dutch)

Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO) was founded in Amsterdam in 1973. It is the largest national student organisation in the Netherlands and pursues benefits for nearly 700,000 students of universities and universities of applied sciences.

The ISO aims to represent all students at universities and universities of applied science; ensure access to higher education for all people who are motivated and have the intellectual capacity to finish an educational programme, regardless of their socio-economic and financial-economic background; pursue a high quality higher education system; and comply with all national and international norms on higher education that contribute to the above missions.

## **7 Tuition fees and financial support for students**

### **1) Tuition fees**

The Dutch universities and universities of applied sciences charge tuition fees for both bachelor's and master's programmes,<sup>24</sup> varying according to universities and academic fields. The government sets an upper limit on tuition fees for students who are under 30 years of age, of Dutch or EU nationality and enrolled in a full-time study programme. For other students, the universities themselves determine tuition fees for full-time students who are 30 years old and over, non-EU students or other foreign students who are not eligible for student support and part-time students. The annual tuition fees for enrolment in a degree programme or course at a Dutch higher education institution start at approximately 1,906 Euro for EU students. Generally, tuition fees are higher for non-EU students than for Dutch and EU students, and Dutch and EU students are charged higher fees if they are 30 years old and over.

### **2) Financial aid for students<sup>25</sup>**

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science guarantees the accessibility of higher education, and the government is responsible for financial aid for students. Students can receive a grant or loan from the Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (the Education Executive Agency), abbreviated DUO, which is the Dutch government institution that deals with financial issues for students in the Netherlands.

Dutch students studying at a university or university of applied sciences are generally entitled to financial aid from the Dutch government under certain conditions. These conditions are laid down in the Student Finance Act (WSF<sup>26</sup> 2000). The DUO implements the Act on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Students in doctoral programmes do not need to pay tuition fees, as they are generally paid positions.

<sup>25</sup> The Dutch parliament has passed a new student finance bill. The most important change is the abolition of the basic grant. New financial support for students consists of loans, tuition fee loans, supplementary grants and student travel products. Application of the new financial support system began with students who enrolled from September 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Wet op de studiefinanciering (WSF).

<sup>27</sup> The DUO has existed since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010. The predecessor of it is the Informatie Beheer Groep (IB-Groep).

## **Types of financial aid for students**

Financial aid for students is categorised of the following four components<sup>28</sup>:

- (1) A loan
- (2) A tuition fee loan (solely for university or university of applied sciences education)
- (3) A supplementary grant (linked with student performance)
- (4) A student travel product (linked with student performance)

In principle, only students from EU/EEA countries and Switzerland qualify for financial aid. However, students who do not meet the nationality requirement can apply for a tuition fee loan if they are registered in a full-time or dual-degree programme in a university or university of applied sciences. Supplementary grants and student travel products are financed as performance-based grants. Students are exempted from repayment if they graduate within 10 years, otherwise repayment is required.

### **1. Loans**

Students can apply for a loan from the DUO. They can borrow a maximum amount of 1037.63-1042.13 euro per month. When deciding whether to apply for a loan, students should bear in mind that a loan is independent of their study results and their degrees and that they need to start repaying the loan once they have finished their studies. In addition, students must pay interest on the loan. In 2018, the interest rate was 0 per cent per annum.

### **2. Tuition fee loans**

In addition to loans, students in universities or universities of applied sciences can also apply for a loan to pay their tuition fees. Students can apply for this tuition fee loan at the same time as their performance-related grant and, where applicable, loan. In principle, the repayment phase of a loan is 15 years.<sup>29</sup> The tuition fees loan is paid in monthly instalments. The DUO determines the monthly instalment amount by dividing students' total debt by 180 months (15 years). If students have difficulty paying the specified monthly instalment, they can submit a request to have their monthly instalment reduced. The DUO then calculates the amount they could repay on the basis of their income two years ago.

### **3. Supplementary grant**

In addition to applying for a loan and a tuition fee loan (known as a basic grant until August 2015), students can also apply for a supplementary grant. The amount of the supplementary grant depends on their parents' income. Supplementary grants are provided for their first five months of higher education (or the first 12 months of secondary vocational education) with no need for repayment. The rest is exempted from repayment if a student graduates within 10 years. The maximum supplementary grant is 271.19 euro per month.

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<sup>28</sup> Previously, there was basic grant (performance-based grant), but it was abolished in September 2015. If students still receive a basic grant, they fall within the old student finance system.

<sup>29</sup> The repayment phase was extended from 15 to 35 years in September, 2015.

## **4. Student travel product**

The student travel product is a part of financial aid for students. Students are entitled to it during their entire period of financial aid. The student travel product covers transportation fees for trains, buses, metros and trams, allowing students to ride for free or at a reduced rate. Students can choose a seasonal pass for travel on weekdays or weekends.

## **8 Legislation**

- The Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) 1993 (the year of latest amendment is 2017)
- The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB)<sup>30</sup> 1996
- The Student Finance Act (WSF)<sup>31</sup> 2000

### **1) Code of Conduct**

The Code of Conduct<sup>32</sup> came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 2006. The Code concerns the acceptance of international students by Dutch higher education institutions. By signing the Code, institutions in effect offer international students a guarantee regarding the quality of their programmes, student recruitment and selection and counselling procedures. Only institutions that have signed up to the Code are allowed to recruit international students.

### **Providing information to international students<sup>33</sup>**

The Code of Conduct requires educational institutions to provide international students with reliable information on their study programmes. This includes information such as accreditation status, quality of education, admission requirements and other important rules and procedures for international students.

Institutions must provide international students with information on visas and residence permits, housing provisions, orientations, student counselling and relevant expenses related to these services intelligibly either in English, or the native language of the international student, in the study programme.

Students from outside the EU are not allowed to obtain visas when they choose courses provided by higher education institutions that have not signed the Code.

<sup>30</sup> The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB): Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs

<sup>31</sup> The Student Financial Support Act (WSF): Wet op de studiefinanciering

<sup>32</sup> Code of Conduct: Gedragscode internationale student in het Nederlandse hoger onderwijs

<sup>33</sup> The full version of the Code of Conduct can be found on the Nuffic website, Internationalstudy.nl (English). This website provides a list of the institutions that have signed the Code and also provides information on what to do if a student feels that his/her institution is not meeting the terms of the Code of Conduct.

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## III. The quality assurance system

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### 1 Summary of the Dutch quality assurance system

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Pursuant to the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), all academic degree programmes offered by universities and universities of applied sciences are obliged to be periodically assessed based on a set of criteria. This is called **accreditation**, and it is carried out by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). **Institutional audit** and **programme assessment** are combined under the current accreditation system.

The NVAO accredits bachelor's, master's programmes and associate degree programmes. Ph.D. programmes are outside the scope of the accreditation process, because each university is supposed to have responsibility for the quality of those programmes.

The accredited programmes are provided recognition for six years and registered in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO) during that period. Only accredited programmes are eligible for government financial aid for students.

The NVAO also conducts other assessments including **recognition of new institutions or programmes** and **assessment of distinctive (quality) features**.

Universities, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) conduct a publicly funded **research assessment** based on the research activities of higher education institutions once every six years. The boards of the universities, the NWO and the Academy take full responsibility for the assessments and follow up on them within their own institutions in accordance with the Standards Evaluation Protocol (SEP) stipulated by the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU).<sup>34</sup>

### 2 Historical background

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#### **1980–1990s: Introduction of assessment for higher education in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, research assessment began to be carried out prior to education assessment, while assessment for the use of resources in research was conducted under the Conditional Funding (CF) policy of 1983. In 1985, two years after the introduction of the CF, the HOAK policy paper was published (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen 1985). In this paper, it was proposed that the idea of quality assessment was to be extended from research only to all major primary activities of higher education institutions. This resulted in the necessity of developing quality assessment processes

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<sup>34</sup> Vereniging van universiteiten (VSNU)

for teaching. Based on that idea, the VSNU started developing quality assessment methods for teaching at universities.

In designing the quality assessment procedure, the VSNU adopted the CF assessment procedure and the decades-long US experience with programme review and specialised accreditation. Accordingly, the new procedure was introduced and has been a form of programme assessment since the academic year 1987–1988 (during the first year, the programme operated on a pilot basis). Across a cycle of 6 years the VSNU appointed a number of ad hoc visiting committees to evaluate all programmes of study in their respective disciplines. The same principles were also applied to universities of applied sciences in their assessment of the quality of teaching. The HBO Council, the umbrella organisation of universities of applied sciences, started programme assessment in 1990.

The Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), which came into force in 1993, stipulated that, while institutions are entitled to compose their educational programmes by themselves, they are responsible for the quality of their education and research. Quality control is carried out by the institutions themselves, by external experts and, on behalf of the government, by the Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het onderwijs* in Dutch).<sup>35</sup> In principle, the government assesses (on an ex post basis only) whether funds have been deployed effectively and whether the intended results have been achieved.

### **2000s: Introduction of accreditation system and establishment of NVAO**

With the introduction of the bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree structure in 2002–2003, the Dutch authorities became aware of the importance of an accreditation system for quality assurance in education. The Accreditation Act<sup>36</sup> was passed in July 2002. This resulted in the establishment of the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (Nederlandse Accreditatie Organisatie, NAO)<sup>37</sup> and accreditation started from the following year (first cycle: 2003–2010). Following a decision made in 2005 to combine the accreditation of Dutch education and education in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium), the NAO became the Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie (NVAO).

The accreditation system for the first cycle targeted the programmes that already had publicly-recognised academic degrees. The framework for accreditation consisted of three steps. The first step was self-evaluation. The second step was assessment by external quality assurance agencies certified by the NVAO. The third step was judgement of accreditation results by the NVAO. The NVAO had also developed several protocols that quality assurance agencies were required to follow. It had been given the legal task of annually drawing up a list of quality assurance agencies<sup>38</sup> considered

<sup>35</sup> The Inspectorate of Education evaluates the external QA system; write about the state of higher education in their annual reports; investigate when there are complaints from students or indications that higher education institutions are not complying with legislation; advise the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science on the fulfilment of legal conditions of new providers; and conduct thematic research with regard to the quality of higher education. The Inspectorate of Education and the NVAO concluded a treaty in March 2014 to avoid duplication or accumulation of supervision and to work effectively.

<sup>36</sup> Wet op de accreditatie.

<sup>37</sup> Nederlandse Accreditatie Organisatie (NAO).

<sup>38</sup> Seven quality assurance agencies were included on the list in 2006, including five agencies in the Netherlands, such as the Quality Agency Netherlands Universities (QANU), and two German agencies such as the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA). With the introduction of the second cycle this list ceased to exist.

capable of producing assessment reports that meet NVAO requirements. In addition, in accordance with the system implemented by the NVAO, other quality assurance agencies should undergo an audit every two years.

In 2003, the assessment system for academic research in the Netherlands changed radically. Previously, research assessments were conducted nationally once every five years per discipline and were organised by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). Subsequently, the boards of universities, the NWO and the Academy have taken full responsibility and conducted assessment based on the protocol “Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP)” which the VSNU and the other related institutions formulated. Under this assessment system, which is still in place, all publicly-funded research is assessed once every six years.

### **2010: Implementation of the accreditation system combining institutional audit and programme assessment**

In the Netherlands, the second cycle started in 2011. When the framework for accreditation in the second cycle was designed, it fostered a culture of quality within higher education institutions and reduced the burden of bureaucratic tasks. These were taken into account while still maintaining accreditation at the programme level. As a result, institutional audits started to be carried out in the second cycle. Accordingly, two types of programme assessments, which differ depending on the number of the standards, were introduced. Those institutions that received a positive judgement in institutional audits were to be assessed with fewer standards in the programme assessment. The second cycle was implemented until 2016 and the third cycle began in 2017.

When the framework for accreditation in the third cycle was designed, consideration was given to further reduction of the administrative burden of assessment while expanding the role and involvement of students as well as faculty and administrative staff members. An overview of the assessment mechanism in the third cycle is given latter on (p. 24).

## **3 Types of quality assurance systems**

### **1) Recognition of higher education institutions**

In the Netherlands, private institutions that are not funded by the government can apply for recognition as legal bodies for higher education (called RPHO institutions) from the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, who allows them to provide accredited programmes. RPHO institutions are private institutions stipulated by the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act as specifically distinguished from government-funded universities and universities of applied sciences. Once accredited, the programmes provided by RPHO institution are recognised by the Act. Their diplomas are equal to diplomas awarded by government-funded institutions. Meanwhile, recognition of universities and universities of applied sciences is not clearly stipulated in the Act.

The process of recognition as an RPHO institution is composed of the following three steps, all implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Inspectorate of Education and the NVAO. Meanwhile, recognition of universities and HBO institutions is not specified in the

Dutch legislation.

(1) Programme assessment by the NVAO

To receive approval for establishment, an institution must firstly apply to the NVAO for the initial assessment of their programmes. The NVAO then assesses the institution. In the second cycle during 2011–2016, the same methodology of an extensive initial accreditation procedure was adopted (p. 40). This is not an ex-ante assessment but rather the programme is required to demonstrate its (actual) quality. This assessment must be carried out after the first cohort of students graduate, in order to assess the quality of their learning outcomes in the programme. After assessing a programme, the NVAO makes a decision within a timeframe of six months. In the third cycle started in January 2017, programmes are assessed using the same procedure of programme assessment.

(2) Recommendation from the Inspectorate of Education

After the institution that applied for the initial programme assessment receives a positive judgement from the NVAO, it subsequently requests a recommendation from the Inspectorate of Education. The Inspectorate of Education assesses the sustainability of the prospective legal body, including its compliance with the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act and issues a recommendation based on its findings to the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

(3) Recognition by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science

The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science makes a judgement regarding recognition of the institution as a *RPHO institution* following a positive judgement by the NVAO and a recommendation from the Inspectorate of Education.

Institutions recognised as RPHO institutions are entitled to apply for extensive programme assessment for their other programmes (initial accreditation with the extensive assessment framework in the second cycle). They also have the right to apply for the institutional audit. If they receive a positive judgement in the audit, their programmes can be assessed under the limited assessment framework (p. 29).

## 2) Framework of external assessments

### Second cycle (2011–2016)

The framework of the Dutch quality assurance system is organised primarily at the programme level. Thus, it focuses on the quality of individual programmes. In addition to this scope, the NVAO started institutional quality assurance assessment from the second cycle, which is a scheme of assessment at the institutional level. Institutional quality assurance assessment demonstrates the extensive institution-wide initiatives carried out by institutions to improve the quality of their programmes. The following assessments were implemented as external assessments<sup>39</sup> in the Netherlands.

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<sup>39</sup> An outline of the accreditation system was explained in a document issued in December 2014 entitled “Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system.”

- **Institutional quality assurance assessment (institutional audit)**
  - Institutional quality assurance assessment is aimed at assessing whether the board of an institution has implemented an effective internal quality assurance system, based on its vision for the quality of the education provided. This enables it to guarantee the quality of the programmes offered.
- **Limited/extensive programme assessment**
  - Programme assessment is being offered for existing programmes that are eligible for award degrees and that are registered in the CROHO.  
There are two types of assessments that differ depending on the number of standards. One is called limited programme assessment, which is a programme-level framework with limited assessment criteria for the accreditation of institutions that received a positive judgement in the institutional quality assurance assessment. The other is called extensive programme assessment, which is a programme-level framework with extensive assessment criteria for accreditation. Extensive assessment is required if the result of the institutional quality assurance assessment turns out to be a negative judgement or the institution has never applied for an institutional quality assurance assessment.
- **Limited/extensive initial accreditation**
  - Initial accreditation is conducted for new programmes that have not been registered in the CROHO, the official register in the Netherlands. New programmes as well as existing registered programmes are assessed under either the limited or the extensive accreditation framework, depending on the results of the institutional quality assurance assessment.
- **Assessment of distinctive (quality) features**
  - Assessment of distinctive (quality) features is a voluntary assessment aimed at identifying whether an institution or a programme has any distinctive quality features. Programmes and institutions can apply for any type of distinctive (quality) feature at their own request. Recently, however, the NVAO has developed frameworks for the assessment of certain distinctive (quality) features including internationalisation and entrepreneurship.

### **Third cycle (2017-)**

During the second cycle, people involved in higher education called for reducing the burden of assessment tasks while introduction of a quality assurance system promoted trust in the higher education system. The new accreditation framework in the third cycle that began from January 2017 has been optimised to help the quality assurance system of higher education fit the current situation in the Netherlands and reduce the burden on institutions and their programmes.

Changes compared to the second cycle are as follows:

- Programme assessments are carried out within a common framework for all programmes regardless of their type (e.g. new/existing programme, academic/professional programme, associate/bachelor's/master's degree).
- No specified format for self-evaluations is provided. Institutions are permitted to submit existing documents or use their own original formats.
- If a panel requests additional documents during a site visit, the request can be restricted in light of the institution's intention.

- There are many other differences for the third cycle, please see:  
[https://www.nvao.com/system/files/procedures/Important%20differences%20assessment%20frameworks%202014-2016\\_0.pdf](https://www.nvao.com/system/files/procedures/Important%20differences%20assessment%20frameworks%202014-2016_0.pdf).

Except for institutional audits, the new frameworks for the third cycle are applied after November 2017. For institutional audits, the new framework is applicable after January 2017, just after the third cycle starts.

### **Types of external assessments**

Categories of evaluation	Second cycle (2011–2016)			
	Institutional audit	Limited/extensive initial accreditation	Limited/extensive programme assessment	Assessment of distinctive (quality) features
	Third cycle (2017-)			
	Institutional audits	Programme assessment		Institutional audits or programme assessment
Evaluator	NVAO	NVAO	NVAO and other QAA <sup>40</sup>	NVAO and other QAA
Type	Institution-based	Programme-based		Programme/Institution-based
Purpose	To assess the extent to which an internal quality assurance system is working in an effective way	For registration in the CROHO <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;">           The institutions can obtain the right to confer a degree to their students authorised by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.         </div>	For updating registration in the CROHO <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;">           The institutions can keep the right to confer a degree to their students authorised by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.         </div>	To identify distinctive features of the assessed programmes or the institution
Anticipated entity	Institutions wishing to be assessed	Programme yet to be registered in the CROHO	Programmes already registered in the CROHO	Institutions wishing to be assessed
Obligation and cycle	Voluntary <sup>41</sup>	Mandatory / When register in the CROHO <sup>42</sup>	Mandatory / At least once in six years (Apply a year before expiration)	Voluntary

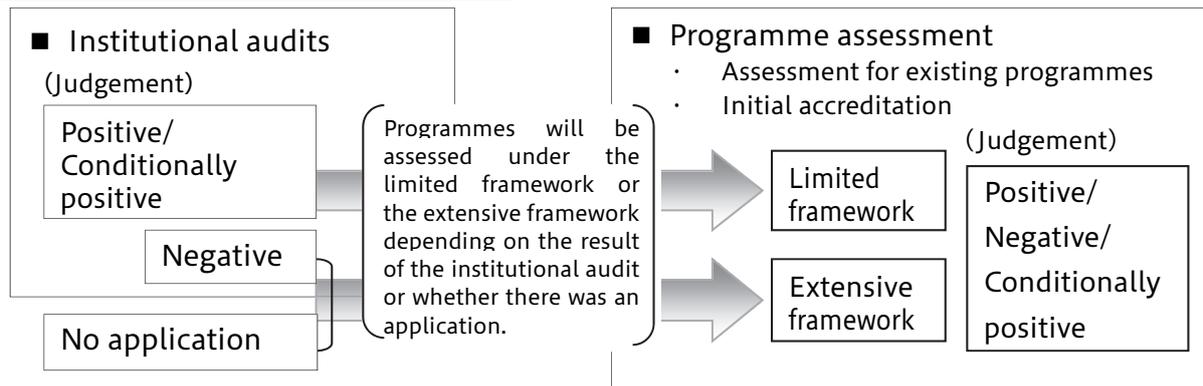
In the third cycle, initial accreditation and programme assessment of the second cycle were integrated into programme assessment and assessment of distinctive (quality) features can be carried out in either programme assessment or institutional audits. The details are explained in the next part referring to the frameworks of the third cycle.

<sup>40</sup> Refer to p. 16. Higher education institutions have to hire an external secretary who has been trained by the NVAO. Since in practice this secretary works for quality assurance agencies, the agencies no longer play the formal role they played in the first cycle. There is not currently a list of quality assurance agencies, but there is a list of trained external secretaries.

<sup>41</sup> An institution that receives a positive judgement in the institutional audit can apply for limited initial accreditation/limited programme assessment, which has fewer standards. (This possibility has not really been used by private higher education institutions.)

<sup>42</sup> The anticipated occasions are when a higher education institution is newly established and when an existing higher education institution provides new programmes.

## Assessment scheme of the third cycle



### (1) Institutional audits

Institutional audits are aimed at assessing whether the internal quality assurance system of an institution has been implemented in an effective way based on the institute's vision of the quality of education, assuring the quality of the programmes the institution offers. Institutional audits do not target individual programmes offered by each institution.

Institutional audits started from the second cycle. The term of validity of the audit result is six years. Before the term of validity expires, institutions apply for an institutional audit to receive a positive judgement for the next cycle. In the third cycle, performance is taken into consideration, when institutions that received a positive judgement in the institutional audit during the previous cycle are assessed.

### Assessment framework for institutional audits (as of the third cycle (2017.11-))

#### Standard 1: Philosophy and policy

The institution has a broadly supported educational philosophy and pursues a corresponding policy focused on the internal quality assurance of its education.

#### Standard 2: Implementation

The institution realises its educational philosophy in an effective manner, which is demonstrated by appropriate policy actions and processes, particularly relating to staff, student assessment, services and facilities, and students with a functional impairment.

#### Standard 3: Evaluation and monitoring

The institution systematically evaluates whether the intended policy objectives relating to educational quality are achieved. Relevant stakeholders are involved in this process.

#### Standard 4: Development

The institution has a focus on development and works systematically on the improvement of its education.

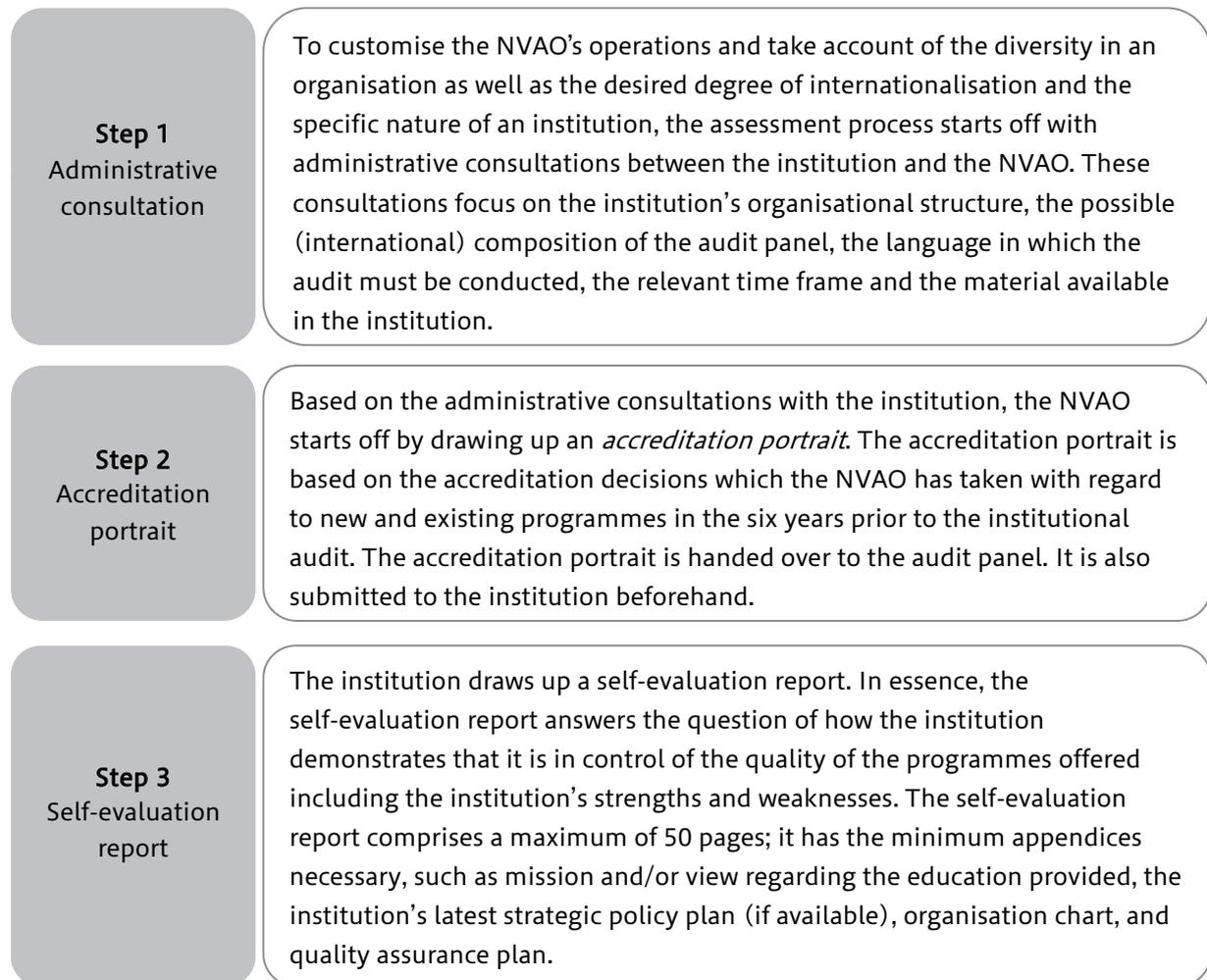
### Composition of the audit panel

The NVAO convenes and appoints a panel to conduct the institutional audit. The audit panel must be composed of at least four members, including one student.

Under the new framework, the NVAO provides all panel members with a briefing and/or a training

course specifically aimed at institutional audits. The audit panels must be independent of the institution that they will assess (for at least five years, they must have had no direct or indirect ties with the institution to be audited that would lead to a conflict of interest). Moreover, expertise requirements for institutional audits have been expanded to include effectiveness of quality assurance systems, social sphere, professional field, and expertise related to specific aspects.

### **Assessment process**



#### Step 4 Site visit

The site visit comprises two components and takes a total of two to five days.

##### First visit: exploration

The first visit has an exploratory nature. It identifies the topics to be assessed in more detail with attention given to the board of the institution and satisfaction among students, teaching staff and other stakeholders. During the first visit, the audit panel, meets with the supervisory board, the board of the institution, the managers responsible for education, quality assurance experts and other relevant staff, teachers and students from representative bodies.

##### Second visit: in-depth study

The second visit is held two to four weeks after the first visit. (In the third cycle, when it is to be a re-application for an institutional audit and it is a request by the institution, the NVAO may decide that the first and second visit are carried out consecutively.) During the second visit to the institution, a further discussion takes place between the audit panel and representatives of the institution regarding points for attention emerging from the meetings and the documents studied during the first visit. The audit panel needs to demonstrate how it has ascertained whether an institution's quality assurance system works.

#### Step 5 Advisory report

The audit panel secretary draws up an advisory report comprising a maximum of 30 pages. The main content of the report is made up of the panel's judgements regarding the standards. The NVAO forwards the advisory report to the board of the institution once all panel members have approved its contents. The institution is given a term to respond to any factual inaccuracies in the report. The report is signed by the chair and the secretary of the panel and submitted to the NVAO for decision-making.

### Judgement

Judgement for each standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets the standard</li> <li>• Does not meet the standard</li> <li>• Partially meets the standard</li> </ul>
General judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Negative</li> <li>• Conditionally positive</li> </ul>

< Rules for results >

- **Positive:** the institution meets all standards.
- **Conditionally positive:** a judgement expressed as "partially meets the standard" for a maximum of two standards, with conditions set down.
- **Negative:** the institution "fails to meet one or more standards" and the institution "partially meets three or more other standards."

A "positive" judgement is valid for a term of six years. The programme assessments may be conducted in accordance with the limited framework.

A “conditionally positive” judgement is valid for a maximum of two years. During that period, the programme assessments are conducted in accordance with the limited framework. A positive judgement of programme assessment based on the limited framework is subsequently valid for a maximum of two years. When given a “conditionally positive” judgement, the institution must acquire a positive judgement within the stipulated timeframe, whereby the NVAO ascertains, based on the judgement of the audit panel, whether the institution meets the conditions set. When given a “positive” judgement, the period of validity for programme assessment is extended for six years. Meanwhile, if the institution fails to apply for an additional assessment or does not meet the conditions, the positive judgement expires.

A “negative” judgement means that an institution cannot apply for an institutional audit for a period of three years. Any programme assessments are carried out in accordance with the extensive framework. Note that the final conclusion following institutional audits will be “negative” whenever the standards 1 or 4 are judged to “not meet the standard.”

## **(2) Programme assessment**

In the second cycle, the NVAO conducted two types of programme assessment for existing programmes, which differed depending on the number of standards. One was a programme-level framework with “limited assessment criteria for the accreditation of institutions” whose institutional quality assurance assessment produced a positive result — the so-called limited programme assessment. The other was a programme-level framework with “extensive assessment criteria for accreditations” — the so-called extensive programme assessment which is required if the judgement in the institutional audit turns out to be negative, and for those institutions that have not applied for an institutional quality assurance assessment. Apart from this, programme assessment for new programmes (initial accreditation) also existed independently. In the third cycle, the framework of initial accreditation for new programmes has been integrated into the framework of programme assessments.

The new framework for programme assessment in the third cycle is carried out based on common standards, the composition of the assessment panel and the assessment process for all programmes regardless of the programme type (e.g. new/existing programme, academic/professional programme, associate/bachelor’s/master’s degree). However, the focal points are different depending on whether the programme is new or existing.

The assessment of existing programmes focuses on the quality achieved on learning outcomes, curriculum, teaching-learning environment, student assessment and teacher evaluation. The assessment of new programmes, on the other hand, involves an ex-ante assessment, which focuses on plans, pre-conditions, and wherever applicable, quality achieved.

## Assessment framework for the limited programme assessment (as of the third cycle (2017.11-))

### Limited programme assessment (4 standards)

#### Intended learning outcomes

**Standard 1:** The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

#### Teaching-learning environment

**Standard 2:** The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### Student assessment

**Standard 3:** The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

#### Achieved learning outcomes

**Standard 4:** The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. (Cf. paragraph on initial accreditations, Exception: ex-ante assessment in initial accreditations.<sup>43</sup>)

### Extensive programme assessment (11 standards)

#### Intended learning outcomes

**Standard 1:** The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline and international requirements.

#### Curriculum; orientation

**Standard 2:** The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.

#### Curriculum; content

**Standard 3:** The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### Curriculum; learning environment

**Standard 4:** The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### Intake

**Standard 5:** The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

#### Staff

**Standard 6:** The staff team is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content and educational expertise. The team size is sufficient.

#### Facilities

**Standard 7:** The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

#### Tutoring

**Standard 8:** The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.

<sup>43</sup> For a new programme that has not started to provide education and in which the institution involved does not (yet) hold a positive or conditionally positive decision in an institutional audit, the programme assessment will be carried out three years after the programme is implemented.

**Quality assurance**

**Standard 9:** The programme has an explicit and widely supported quality assurance system in place. It promotes the quality culture and has a focus on development.

**Student assessment**

**Standard 10:** The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.

**Achieved learning outcomes**

**Standard 11:** The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

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**Composition of the assessment panel**

The panel is composed of a minimum of four members, who have the following expertise.

- Up-to-date knowledge of the relevant discipline
- (Recent) teaching and testing experience in the same type of education (professional higher education / academic higher education, Master's / Bachelor's / Associate Degree programmes)
- An ability to compare the programme in an international perspective
- Experiences in the (international) professional field of the discipline concerned
- Experiences with peer review in higher education
- If applicable: knowledge of a specific teaching concept
- If applicable: expertise related to the distinctive feature applied for

A student enrolled in higher education institutions (engaged in quality assurance) is also included in the panel. The panel is supported by a secretary trained by the NVAO who does not formally sit on the panel.

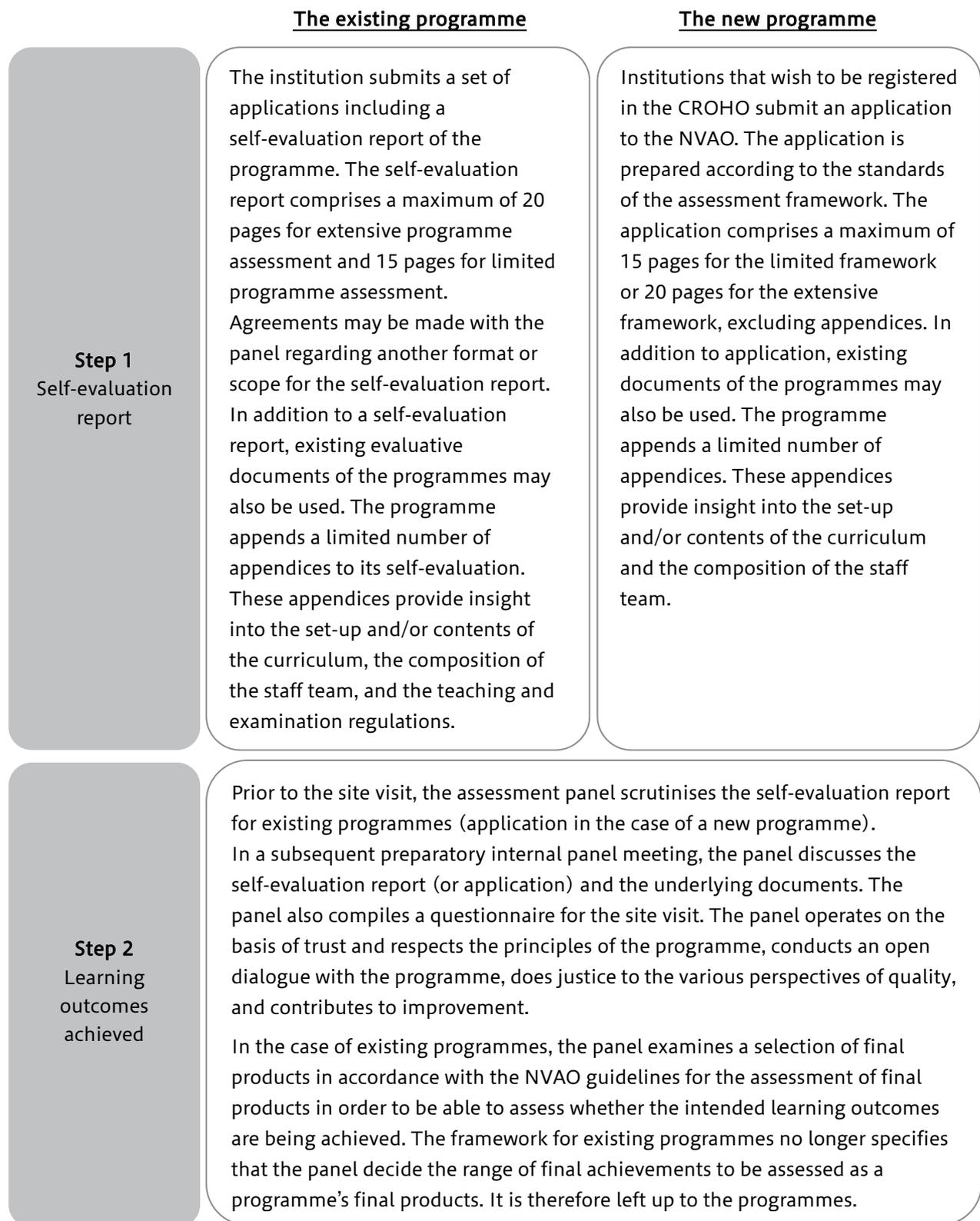
In addition, the panel members are independent of the programme (for at least five years, they have had no direct nor indirect ties with the institution providing the programme that would lead to a conflict of interest). Prior to the assessment, the panel members sign a declaration of independence.

**Assessment clusters**

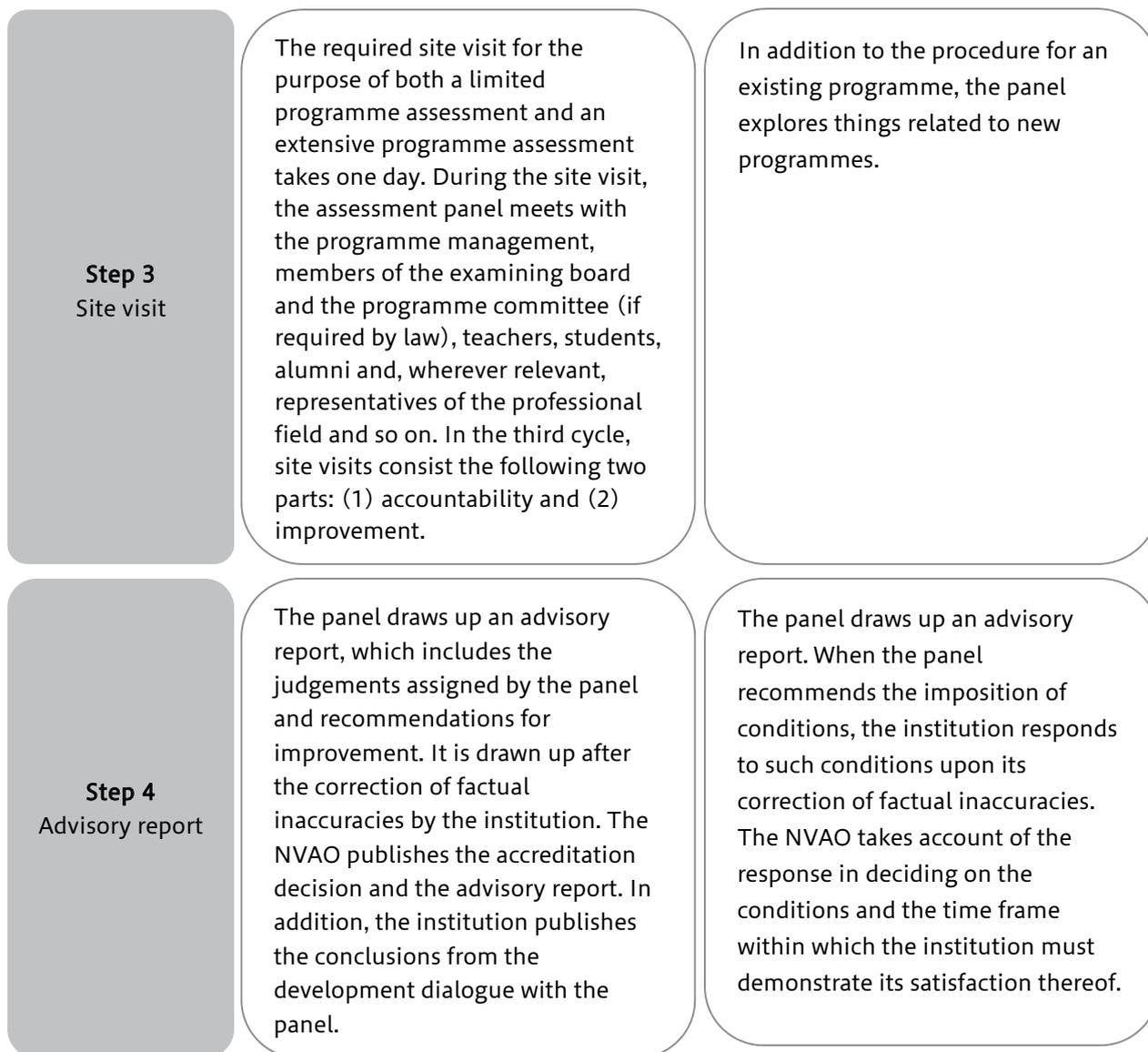
Existing programmes are assessed for each assessment cluster. A single panel conducts a comparative assessment of the entire cluster. The boards of the institutions concerned submit a coordinated proposal regarding the panel composition to the NVAO for approval (listing the secretary and process coordinator, if any). This proposal specifies how the panel will contribute to a consistent comparison between programmes. The NVAO assesses the competence, independence and mutual cooperation of the panel on the basis of the above criteria.

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## Assessment process<sup>44</sup>



<sup>44</sup> In 2016, NVAO charges 800 euro for a programme assessment ( 112,000 JPY \*1 euro = 140 JPY).



**Judgement for existing programmes<sup>45</sup>**

Judgement for each standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent</li> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Satisfactory</li> <li>• Unsatisfactory</li> </ul>
General judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent</li> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Satisfactory</li> <li>• Unsatisfactory</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> Total number of applications from the Netherlands processed by the NVAO in 2017: 386 (Details) Programme accreditations: 291, Institutional audits: 2, Initial accreditations: 93. The NVAO also processed 18 applications (Institutional review) from Flanders in 2015-2017.

The NVAO defines *generic quality* in accreditation as “the quality that is expected to be eligible for bachelor’s or master’s programmes of higher education in light of an international viewpoint.” Under this definition, four scales for judgement are provided as indicated below.

Excellent	The programme systematically well surpasses the current generic quality standards across its entire spectrum and is regarded as an international example.
Good	The programme systematically surpasses the current generic quality standard.
Satisfactory	The programme meets the current generic quality standards and demonstrates an acceptable level across its entire spectrum.
Unsatisfactory	The programme does not meet the current generic quality standards and shows serious shortcomings in several areas.

Based on the assessment results, the NVAO decides to grant accreditation to a programme, or not, or to allow it an improvement period. Programmes must meet the generic quality standards stated in the relevant framework in order to receive a positive judgement. Programmes that are granted an overall judgement expressed as “excellent,” “good” or “satisfactory” can receive or maintain their accreditation status. The accreditation status is valid for a term of six years.

When the NVAO judges that a programme does not meet all of the standards but anticipates that it can improve within a timeframe of no more than two years, the programme receives accreditation status with an enforced improvement period.

#### <Rules for results: Limited programme assessments>

- **Excellent:** a judgement expressed as “excellent” for at least two standards, one of which must be standard 4 and a judgement expressed as at least “satisfactory” for the remaining standards.
- **Good:** a judgement expressed as “good” for at least two standards, one of which must be standard 4, as well as a judgement expressed as at least “satisfactory” for the remaining standards.
- **Satisfactory:** a judgement expressed as “satisfactory” for at least two standards, one of which must be standard 1. In addition, it is required that the institution must improve any shortcomings expressed as “unsatisfactory” within two years.
- **Unsatisfactory:** i) standard 1 is expressed as “unsatisfactory”; or ii) one or two standards are expressed as “unsatisfactory” and improvement within two years is unexpected; or iii) three or more standards are expressed as “unsatisfactory”.

#### <Rules for results: Extensive programme assessments>

- **Excellent:** a judgement expressed as “excellent” for at least five standards, one of which must be standard 11, as well as a judgement expressed as at least “satisfactory” for the remaining standards.
- **Good:** a judgement expressed as “good” for at least five standards, one of which must be standard 11, as well as a judgement expressed as at least “satisfactory” for the remaining standards.
- **Satisfactory:** a judgement expressed as at least “satisfactory” for at least six standards, one of which must be standard 1. In addition, it is required that the institution must improve any

shortcomings expressed as “unsatisfactory” within two years.

- **Unsatisfactory:** i) standard 1 is expressed as “unsatisfactory”; or ii) at least six standards are expressed as “unsatisfactory” and improvement within two years is unexpected; or iii) less than six standards are expressed as “satisfactory”.

### Judgement for new programmes (initial accreditation)

Judgement for each standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets the standard</li> <li>• Does not meet the standard</li> <li>• Partially meets the standard</li> </ul>
General judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Negative</li> <li>• Conditionally positive</li> </ul>

#### <Rules for results: Limited initial accreditation>

- **Positive:** the programme meets all the standards.
- **Conditionally positive:** a judgement expressed as “partially meets the standard” for a maximum of two standards, with conditions being imposed.
- **Negative:** a judgement expressed as “does not meet the standard” for one or more standards, as well as a judgement of “partially meets the standard” for three or more other standards.

#### <Assessment rules: Extensive initial accreditation>

- **Positive:** the programme meets all the standards.
- **Conditionally positive:** the programme meets at least six standards and is granted a judgement expressed as “partially meets” for the remaining standards, with conditions being imposed.
- **Negative:** a judgement expressed as “does not meet the standard” for one or more standards, as well as a judgement of “meets the standard” for less than six standards.

Programmes that receive a positive judgement are registered in the CROHO and the accreditation status is valid for a term of six years. A programme has to reapply for initial accreditation in the case of receiving a conditionally positive judgement.

## (3) Assessment of distinctive (quality) features

In the third cycle, the assessment of distinctive (quality) features is generally combined with the framework of institutional audit or programme assessment

### ○Assessment of quality in internationalisation

Assessment of quality in internationalisation is one of themes for the assessment of distinctive (quality) features.

The NVAO has engaged as a coordinator for the project called the Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation (CeQuInt<sup>46</sup>). The coordinator is a member of the European Consortium for

<sup>46</sup> The official name is the Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation (2012–2015). This was a project in which 11 European nations and 14 quality assurance agencies participated to establish a European certificate system regarding internationalisation by stipulating standards and methods to assess the quality of internationalisation and going through a pilot assessment.

Accreditation (ECA), while the theme related to internationalisation is included in the assessment of distinctive (quality) features.

The CeQuInt project was completed in February 2015 and issuance of a certificate for the quality of internationalisation became a service provided by the ECA. Accordingly, the NVAO conducts the assessment of internationalisation by following the frameworks for the assessment of quality in internationalisation. Higher education institutions in the Netherlands apply to the NVAO for the assessment of quality in internationalisation by institution/programme.

### **Standards and judgements**

Standards and judgements in the CeQuInt have been compiled in the Frameworks for the Assessment of Quality in Internationalisation issued by the ECA in 2015.

<b>Assessment standards (programme-based)</b>	<b>Assessment standards (institution-based)</b>
<b>1. Intended internationalisation</b>	<b>1. Intended internationalisation</b>
<b>2. International and intercultural learning</b>	<b>2. Action plans</b>
<b>3. Teaching and Learning</b>	<b>3. Implementation</b>
<b>4. Staff</b>	<b>4. Enhancement</b>
<b>5. Students</b>	<b>5. Governance</b>

The assessment scale consists of the following four levels: “excellent,” “good,” “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory.”

When a programme or an institution receives a judgement expressed as “excellent” or “good” for three out of the five standards and no judgement expressed as “unsatisfactory,” the Certificate for Quality in Programme Internationalisation or Institutional Internationalisation is issued.

### **(4) Research assessment**

In 2003, the methodology for assessment of academic research in the Netherlands changed radically. Previously, the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU) conducted research assessments for each academic field once every five years. Since 2003, the three main Dutch research funding organisations responsible for publicly-funded research, which are universities, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) have defined the protocol for practical use in all coming research assessments and assessment for all publicly-funded research has been conducted once every six years. In the assessment scheme, the boards of universities, the NWO and the Academy take full responsibility for the assessments and follow up on them within their own institutions.

## ○Standard evaluation protocol

Research assessment is conducted in accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol, which was drawn up and adopted by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

The Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) stipulates the methods for research assessment conducted at Dutch universities, the NWO and the Academy every six years as well as the aims of such assessments. The current protocol is the Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015–2021 announced in March 2014, which includes evaluation standards and processes.

The boards of the universities or the research institutions take full responsibility for research assessments and follow up on them within their own institutions (they decide the unit of research). For example, they are responsible for assessment of every unit within their institution once every six years.

Standards for research assessment consist of the following three elements.

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1. Research quality

2. Relevance to society

3. Viability

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\*Every assessment also considers at least two further aspects: Ph.D. programmes and research integrity.

## IV. Overview of a quality assurance agency: Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

### 1 Overview of the organisation

Name of the organisation	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO) (English) Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
Character of the organisation	An independent accreditation organisation established by the Dutch and Flemish governments
Year of establishment	2003 (formally established in 2005 when all legal formalities regarding the establishment of the NVAO had been concluded)
Location	Parkstraat 28, 2514 JK The Hague, The Netherlands
Representative	Anne Flierman (Chairman)
Finance	Annual budget: 6 million euro (financed jointly by the Netherlands (60%) and Flanders (40%)) *The NVAO also charges fees for accreditation.
Organisation	Managing team: Advisory Council, Board (fewer than 15 members) etc. Staff: 43 <sup>47</sup> (Department Flanders(9), Department The Netherlands(21), Department Support(13))

### 2 Mission and role

The NVAO fulfils the following missions in an international perspective and in the context of the European Bologna process.

- Promoting the quality culture within the higher education institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders
- Involving all stakeholders in the performance of its tasks at both the national and international levels, with other organisations involved in the development of higher education
- Respecting this responsibility and the autonomy of the institutions in all its assessment tasks
- Regarding transparent assurance of the quality of higher education as an important social assignment
- Applying the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and promoting the use of these standards

<sup>47</sup> The NVAO website is: <https://www.nvao.com/about-nvaoorganisation/office>.

## 3 Main area of activity

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### 1) Accreditation

The NVAO is a binational agency, conducting assessments in both the Netherlands and Flanders. The programme accreditations and institutional audits in the Netherlands were explained in Chapter III (see p. 20). In Flanders the NVAO conducts institutional reviews and programme accreditations.<sup>48</sup>

### 2) International activities

The treaty signed by the Dutch and Flemish governments in 2003 stipulates that the international dimension must be considered in the NVAO's mission. In order to adequately fulfil its international role, the NVAO formulated five objectives that outline its international policy. These objectives are:

- Taking the lead in the quality assurance of joint programmes, the mutual recognition of programmes and diplomas, and the dissemination of good practices;
- Involvement in transnational education and entering into collaborative agreements with international professionally-oriented accreditation organisations;
- Propagating the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and ensuring that it explicitly meets higher education;
- Participating in various international organisations and projects, including e.g., assessments in the Dutch Caribbean and Luxembourg.

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<sup>48</sup> Three assessment frameworks were introduced in 2016 in Flanders. Accreditation for existing programmes of higher education institutions in Flanders was abolished while accreditation of new programmes and programmes offered by private providers by the NVAO continues.

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## Appendix. The quality assurance system in the second cycle

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### 1) Assessment of new programmes (initial accreditation)

In the second cycle, the NVAO conducted initial accreditation for new programmes using a framework that was distinguished from those used for institutional audits and programme assessment. Programmes are considered new programmes if they are not registered in the official register of the relevant country (the CROHO in the Netherlands).

There were two types of initial accreditations as well as programme assessment for existing programmes. One was a programme-level framework with “limited assessment criteria for the initial accreditation of new programmes” provided by institutions whose institutional quality assurance assessment produced a positive result (so-called limited initial accreditation). The other was a programme-level framework with “extensive assessment criteria for the initial accreditation of new programmes,” the so-called extensive initial accreditation (required if an institutional quality assurance assessment produces a negative result and for institutions that have not applied for an institutional quality assurance assessment). New bachelor’s and master’s programmes were eligible for the initial accreditation.<sup>49</sup>

As mentioned previously, initial accreditation has been integrated into the framework of programme assessments in the third cycle.

#### Standards (as of the second cycle (2011–2016))

The number of standards differed depending on the type of initial accreditations. Limited initial accreditation had five areas/five standards and extensive initial accreditation had eight areas/twelve standards.

Assessment framework for limited initial accreditation
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- |  |
|--|
| 1. Intended learning outcomes                    |
| 2. Teaching-learning environment                 |
| 3. Assessment                                    |
| 4. Graduation guarantee and financial provisions |
| 5. Achieved learning outcomes (if applicable)    |

Assessment framework for extensive initial accreditation
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- |  |
|--|
| 1. Intended learning outcomes [1 standard] |
| 2. Curriculum [4 standards]                |
| 3. Staff [1 standard]                      |
| 4. Services and facilities [2 standards]   |
| 5. Quality assurance [1 standard]          |

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<sup>49</sup> As mentioned on p. 20, Ph.D. programmes are the responsibility of the individual university and are not included in the scope of the accreditation process.

**6. Assessment [1 standard]****7. Graduation guarantee and financial provisions [1 standard]****8. Achieved learning outcome (if applicable) [1 standard]****2) Institutional audits**

In the second cycle, the following framework was applied. The framework was changed but the procedure did not change significantly in the third cycle.<sup>50</sup>

**Assessment framework for institutional audits (as of the second cycle (2011–2016))****Standard 1: Vision of the quality of the education provided**

The institution has a broadly-supported vision of the quality of its education and the development of a quality culture.

**Standard 2: Policy**

The institution pursues an adequate policy in order to realise its vision of the quality of its education. This comprises at least: policies in the field of education, staff, facilities, accessibility and feasibility for students with a functional disability, embedding of research in the education provided, as well as the interrelation between education and the (international) professional field and discipline.

**Standard 3: Output**

The institution has insight into the extent to which its vision of the quality of its education is realised. It gauges and evaluates the quality of its programmes on a regular basis, among students, staff, alumni and representatives of the professional field.

**Standard 4: Improvement policy**

The institution can demonstrate that it systematically improves the quality of its programmes wherever required.

**Standard 5: Organisation and decision-making structure**

The institution has an effective organisation and decision-making structure with regard to the quality of its programmes, which clearly defines the tasks, authorities and responsibilities and which encompasses the participation of students and staff.

<sup>50</sup> Refer to p. 24 for further details.

### 3) Programme assessment

In the second cycle, the following frameworks had been applied. The framework was changed but procedure was not changed much in the third cycle.<sup>51</sup>

#### Assessment framework for limited programme assessment (as of the second cycle (2011–2016))<sup>52</sup>

##### Limited programme assessment (4 areas • 4 standards)

###### 1. Intended learning outcomes

**Standard 1:** The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation; they meet international requirements.

###### 2. Teaching-learning environment

**Standard 2:** The curriculum, staff and programme-specific services and facilities enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

###### 3. Assessment

**Standard 3:** The programme has an adequate assessment system in place.

###### 4. Achieved learning outcomes

**Standard 4:** The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

##### Extensive programme assessment (7 areas • 11 standards)

###### 1. Intended learning outcomes

**Standard 1:** The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation; they meet international requirements.

###### 2. Curriculum

**Standard 2:** The orientation of the curriculum assures the development of skills in the field of scientific research and/or the professional practice.

**Standard 3:** The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

**Standard 4:** The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

**Standard 5:** The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

###### 3. Staff

**Standard 6:** The staff is qualified and the size of the staff is sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content, educational expertise and organisation.

###### 4. Services and facilities

**Standard 7:** The accommodation and the facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.

<sup>51</sup> Refer to p. 24 for further details.

<sup>52</sup> The standards for programme assessment were published during the second cycle in December 2014, in accordance with revisions of the former system.

**Standard 8:** Tutoring and student information provision bolster students' progress and tie in with the needs of students.

#### 5. Quality assurance

**Standard 9:** The programme is evaluated on a regular basis, partly on the basis of assessable targets.

#### 6. Assessment

**Standard 10:** The programme has an adequate assessment system in place.

#### 7. Learning outcomes achieved

**Standard 11:** The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.

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## 4) Assessment of distinctive (quality) features

In the third cycle, the assessment of distinctive (quality) features is conducted within the scheme of institutional audit or programme assessment, whereas it had been carried out under an independent framework in the second cycle.

The NVAO conducts assessment focusing on distinctive (quality) features of higher education institutions and their programmes. This assessment enables institutions to draw attention to aspects that are not directly related to programme levels but involve, for example, the orientation of a programme. It is also conducted at the request of institutions. Programmes and institutions can apply for it within the scheme of the institutional audit or programme assessment, or outside the scheme. Recently, institutions have been required to choose the themes for assessment out of the following distinctive (quality) features set by the NVAO:

< Themes of distinctive (quality) features<sup>53</sup> >

- Sustainable higher education
- Internationalisation
- Small-scale and intensive education
- Entrepreneurship

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<sup>53</sup> Source: NVAO web site  
<https://www.nvaio.net/beoordelingsproceduresnederland/bijzondere-kenmerken>

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# NIAD-QE's publication NIAD-QE INFORMATION PACKAGE

## STRENGTHENING AN UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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- the Institutional Thematic Assessment: Internationalization of Higher Education

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Compiled in bilingual format, these publications provide basic information on their respective countries' higher-education and quality-assurance systems.



Germany

\*1 NIAD-QE published the Japanese version of Korea's Overview based on the English original version made by KCUE (Korean Council for University Education).

\*2 NIAD-QE published the Japanese version of China's Overview based on the Chinese original version made by HEEC (Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education) and its publications.

### Quality Assurance System in Asian Higher Education

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QA briefing

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The English version of the report covers the essential parts of the Japanese original report.

All of these publications are available on our website:

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# Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education

The Netherlands

Second edition (2018)

Published by:

National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education

1-29-1 Gakuen-Nishimachi, Kodaira, Tokyo 187-8587 Japan

<https://www.niad.ac.jp>

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