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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: NETHERLANDS QUALITY AGENCY (NQA)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of the Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). The purpose of the review is to verify that NQA acts in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015. ENQA requires all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years. Substantial compliance with the ESG is a condition for membership.

The external review has addressed the following activities:

The assessments of degree programmes, including cluster audit visits and meta-analysis; national and international.

This is NQA's first review; it was conducted between December 2017 (Reception of the SAR) and May 2018. In light of the documentary and oral evidence, considered by the review panel, the review panel has the following judgements:

The review panel hopes its findings will provide support and input towards further enhancement to the agency's work in the near future.

In addition, the review panel would like to add an overall conclusion:

NQA is regarded as a competent organization that is managed efficiently and effectively. This includes aspects such as management of processes and panels, the running of schedules and the timely delivery of reports. NQA also enjoys good levels of satisfaction among external stakeholders (institutions, reviewers, NVAO, inspectorate) and internal ones (staff).

This should be particularly noted given the challenging context in which it operates, with strong competition between agencies and limited leverage in the overall operating framework for quality assurance.

Its procedures are well developed, though the self-evaluation report underrepresents their activities and the degree of maturity of their internal quality assurance mechanisms.

The gist of its activities is now well consolidated and mainly focused on programme assessments. There are other activities in its portfolio, but these either have been developed occasionally or are even yet to be implemented. The agency should therefore reflect how relevant is to keep them and, in the positive case, how to develop them more extensively. This may be particularly relevant if the Dutch Quality Assurance System should evolve towards a greater emphasis on internal mechanisms of quality assurance and institutional reviews.

The operation of the agency has been shaped by its small size, the unevenness of the workflow, and the strong focus on its core activities. Thus far, the agency has responded well to the demands, though it could reflect about ways to attain greater maturity and reflexivity. Some key areas in which this could be further developed include the training of panel members and staff, the development of meta and thematic analyses, a clearer separation between assessment and consultancy activities, a greater interaction with stakeholders and the formalization of certain procedures (such as complaints and appeals).

In order to attain a higher degree of maturity, NQA could benefit from investing more in reflecting about its strategy and how to develop a more proactive engagement in the definition of processes and procedures or in the dissemination and analysis of its activities. This would also benefit from some governance adjustments that could include a greater input from external stakeholders and internal consultation, which may be implemented in a way considered as adequate and adapted to its culture, size and management.

Summing-up, NQA is an effective and reliable quality assurance agency that has the potential to improve and to provide a more significant contribution to quality enhancement in Dutch Higher Education. This may be attained through greater reflection and proactivity about quality assurance and the way the agency approaches it.

To conclude, the panel finds NQA fully compliant with the ESG standards 3.2 (official status), 3.7; (cyclical external review of agencies), 2.2 (designing methodologies fit for purpose), 2.3 implementing processes.

The panel also finds NQA substantially compliant with the ESG standards 3.3 (independence), 3.5 (resources), 3.6 (internal quality assurance and professional conduct), 2.1 (consideration of internal quality assurance), 2.4 (peer review experts), 2.5 (criteria for outcomes), 2.6 (reporting).

According to the panel's judgement, NQA partially compliant with the ESG standards 3.1 (activities, policies and procedures for quality assurance), 3.4 (thematic analysis), 2.7 (complaints and appeals).

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between December 2017 and April 2018.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is NQA's first external review, the panel is expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

### REVIEW PROCESS

The 2018 external review of NQA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of NQA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

**Pedro Teixeira (Chair)**, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at University of Porto (U. Porto)  
Director of Centre for Research on Higher Education Policies (CIPES)  
(EUA nominee)

**Núria Comet Señal (Secretary)**, Responsible for Internal Quality and Project Coordinator  
Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya)  
(ENQA nominee)

**Rudy Derdelinckx**, Professor at the University of Antwerp (UA), faculty of Applied Engineering  
Former Managing director of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders  
(NVAO)  
(ENQA nominee)

**Oana Onicas**, Masters Student (Community Development and Urban Planning)  
"Babes-Bolyai" University in Romania  
(ESU nominee)

### Self-assessment report

NQA produced a self-assessment report (SAR), which provided evidence that the review panel used to draw its conclusion. To some extent, additional evidence was needed, due to lacking information in the SAR. At the panel's request, NQA provided additional documents.

Prior to the site visit, an ENQA video conference briefing was held for the panel to discuss the review process and each panel member was encouraged to use the ESG mapping grid, supplied by ENQA, in identifying evidence provided in SAR and supporting the conduct of the site visit. On this basis, the panel identified the lines of enquiry for the review.

## Site visit

The review panel conducted a site visit to NQA on the 26th to the 28th of February 2018. The panel met for a preparatory meeting the day before the site visit to discuss the self-evaluation report and share first impressions regarding compliance with the ESG.

The programme for the site visit (Annex 2) was well planned and coordinated, and the panel could meet with all the stakeholders that it found relevant.

- Director of NQA
- NQA's staff and external secretaries
- NQA's experts (including students)
- Representatives of higher education institutions (Executive board members and Quality assurance officers)
- Representatives of NVAO, of the Inspectorate of Education and of the professional field.

The 13 sessions planned went according to the scheduled programme. The interviews were all conducted in an open and frank atmosphere, and the interviewees provided clear and valuable evidence about NQA and its activities to the review panel. The staff of the agency demonstrated high professionalism during the entire review process and provided excellent assistance to the panel regarding all matters. During the site visit, the panel asked for additional evidence that was quickly provided by NQA.

By the end of the site visit, the panel had a final de-briefing session with the director and the staff of NQA to share its overall impressions in relation to the terms of reference and each of the ESG.

All decisions of the panel on NQA's compliance with the ESG were reached collectively. The secretary of the panel then drafted the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel. The report was based on the self-assessment report, the additional documents received and the findings from the site visit.

The draft was sent to the ENQA coordinator for pre-screening and, subsequently, to NQA for a factual accuracy check in April 2018. The final report was submitted to ENQA.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has the political responsibility for the educational system and is bound by national legislation, namely the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), adopted by the Dutch Parliament in 1993, and the Student Grants Act 2000 (WSF 2000). The Dutch higher education system has three cycles: bachelor programmes (including short cycle (associate degree) programmes), master programmes and postgraduate programmes, including the programmes leading to a PhD degree. (See figure 1)

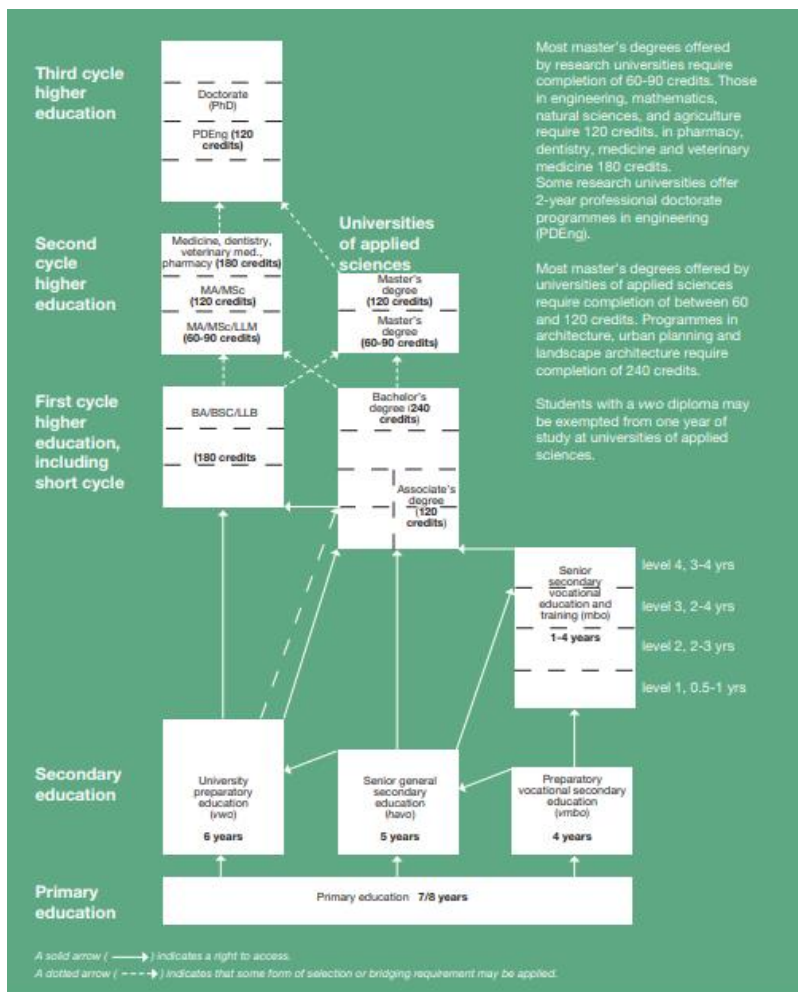


Figure 1: overview of the Dutch education system

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

Dutch higher education has a binary system, which means that students can choose between two types of education:

- research-oriented education, mainly offered by Research Universities
- higher professional education, mainly offered by Universities of Applied Sciences

Both Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences can award bachelor's or master's degrees. Universities of Applied Sciences can offer short cycle degrees (associate degrees). Research Universities can award doctoral (PhD) degrees.

Research Universities may also offer professional bachelor's and master's programmes, and universities of Applied Sciences may offer academic bachelor's and master's programmes. However, this occurs very seldom: some Research Universities offer professional master programmes, some Universities of Applied Sciences offer academic programmes in collaboration with foreign Research Universities.

Research Universities are thus mainly responsible for offering research-oriented programmes in an academic setting. Research Universities include general universities, universities specialising in



engineering and agriculture, and the Open University. A few Research Universities are private organisations, the majority is publicly funded.

Universities of Applied Sciences mainly offer programmes that focus on the practical application of arts and sciences. These tend to be more practice oriented than programmes offered by Research Universities and they prepare students for specific professions. Universities of Applied Sciences include general institutions as well as institutions in a specific field such as agriculture, fine and performing arts or teacher training.

In the Netherlands, public higher institutions are a substantial provider of higher professional education. Private institutions offering academic programmes are limited, most of them offer professional bachelor's and master's programmes.

Higher professional education is divided into two cycles. The first cycle lasts four years (240 EC), including a short cycle (120 EC, EQF level 5) and students are awarded a bachelor's degree (EQF level 6). Most of these bachelor graduates enter the labour market. The second cycle in higher professional education usually lasts one to two years. This cycle leads to a professional master's degree (EQF level 7). It mostly focuses on further specialisation; students often enter these programmes after some professional experience.

The table below shows the number of government funded institutions and students in the Netherlands (ref: 1.10.2017).

<b>Types of higher education institutions</b>	<b>Number of institutions (government funded)</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Research Universities	13	276.713
Universities of Applied Sciences	37	453.354

Figure 2: overview<sup>1</sup> of government funded higher education institutions and student population. (1.10.2017)  
Overall information regarding the higher education system in the Netherlands can be found under:  
<https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-the-netherlands.pdf>  
[http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Higher\\_education\\_system\\_in\\_The\\_Netherlands](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Higher_education_system_in_The_Netherlands)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://cijfers.vereniginghogescholen.nl/index.htm> and [http://www.vsnu.nl/f\\_c\\_studentsen\\_downloads.html](http://www.vsnu.nl/f_c_studentsen_downloads.html)

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Quality assurance in higher education in the Netherlands is defined by law (the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act -WHW).

In 2002, the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research was amended to include accreditation. In the Act, accreditation is described as a quality mark, which expresses that the quality of a degree programme has been assessed positively. Accreditation is a condition for receiving public funding and for the right to award legally recognized degrees.

The accreditation in the Netherlands is administered by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). This organisation was defined by a treaty between the Netherlands and Flanders and started on 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2005. NVAO is a binational organisation, located in The Hague, in the Netherlands.

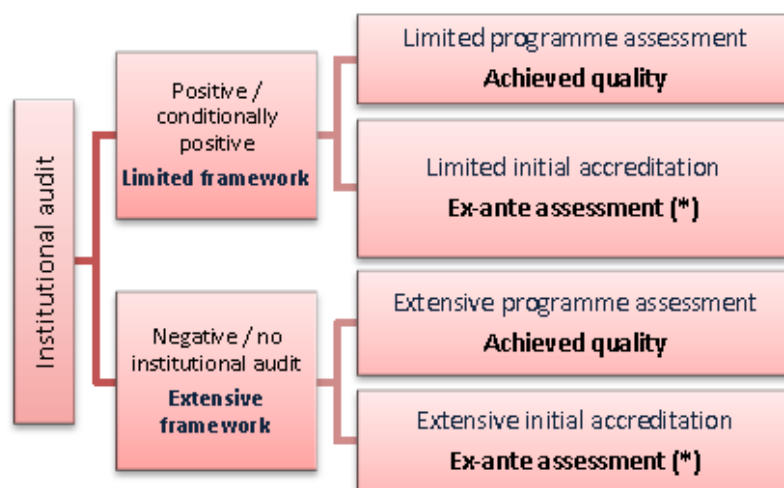
According to the Dutch Higher Education Act, all degree programmes offered by Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences must be evaluated according to established criteria in the Dutch accreditation framework of NVAO. Programmes that meet the criteria are accredited i.e. recognised for a period of six years. Only accredited programmes are eligible for government funding; students receive financial aid and graduate with a recognised degree only when enrolled in, and after having completed an accredited degree programme. By accrediting a programme, NVAO guarantees that a particular programme is up to a minimum internationally accepted standard.

The Dutch accreditation framework, adhered to the national legislation, is defined by NVAO and approved by the Minister.

The accreditation framework defines the procedures for the external quality assurance in Dutch higher education. They concern the goals and learning outcomes of the programme, the curriculum, the learning environment, the personnel and the facilities, the internal quality assurance of the programme, the student assessments and the achieved learning outcomes of the programme (in case of existing programmes). It also defines the criteria for the composition and independence of the assessment panels.

### **Institutional audits and Initial accreditation of new programmes**

As part of the accreditation system, higher education institutions can request the NVAO to conduct an 'institutional audit' to determine the extent to which the institution is capable of guaranteeing the quality of the programmes it offers. Programmes offered by institutions that receive a positive institutional audit still have to be accredited, but the accreditation procedure takes less time and is not as extensive. That means that depending on the outcomes of the institutional audits (which are not obliged), accreditation of programmes is based on a limited or extended framework.



(\*) See *Exception: ex-ante assessment* in Paragraph 2.3. Initial accreditations.

Figure 3: overview of assessment procedures in the Netherlands.

(Image from: *Assessment framework for HE accreditations system of the Netherlands-2016*)

The limited framework consists of four standards: (1) Intended learning outcomes, (2) Teaching-learning environment (3) Student assessment and (4) Achieved learning outcomes.

The extensive framework consists of eleven standards, divided into six themes: (1) Intended learning outcomes, (2) Curriculum, (3) Staff, (4) Services and facilities, (5) Quality assurance and (6) Assessment and achieved learning outcomes.

NVAO is responsible for the composition of the panels for initial accreditation and for the institutional audits. NVAO coordinates the assessments of these programmes and of the institutional audits. The panels assess these programmes and advise NVAO on the accreditation. NVAO accredits the new programmes based on of the panel reports of the assessments.

Other agencies have no role in the assessment of new programmes or in the institutional audits as this task is taken exclusively by NVAO.

### Accreditation of existing programmes

For the accreditation of the existing programmes of Dutch Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences, programmes are clustered in so-called visitation groups. NVAO is responsible for defining these visitation groups. Each cluster of programmes has to be assessed by a single independent panel. In the case of large clusters, more than one panel is accepted, as long as there is sufficient overlap in the composition of the panels. Panels need approval from NVAO, but NVAO does not compose the panels, nor does it coordinate the assessments of existing programmes.

Although institutions have the possibility to organize these external assessments themselves, within the legal rules and the NVAO's framework, in practice this has only occurred in a very few cases. For the external assessment of the approximately 2900 existing bachelor and master programmes in the Netherlands (academic year 2015-2016), institutions contracted external quality agencies, such as NQA to coordinate the external quality assessments of the programmes they offer.

## The role of agencies

Quality agencies are responsible for the coordination of the assessments of existing programmes in higher education. The report of the assessment forms the basis for the accreditation by the NVAO. According to the website of the NVAO, six quality agencies are presently active in the Netherlands:

- AeQui: evaluation organisation for higher education: primarily active in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences.
- Certiked: primarily active in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences.
- Hobéon Certificering bv: primarily active in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences.
- MusiQuE - Musique Quality Enhancement: European consortium, active in the field of music programmes.
- NQA-Netherlands Quality Agency: primarily active in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences.
- QANU-Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities: active in the field of Research Universities.

NQA and Hobéon cover almost 80% of the programme assessments at the Universities of Applied Sciences.

The tasks of the quality agencies are related to the external quality assurance of existing programmes:

- Composing a panel, taking into account the legal criteria and the criteria for the expertise in the panels in the NVAO's accreditation framework. Institutions may give suggestions for possible panel members. NVAO is responsible for the formal approval of the panels.
- In the case of programmes in a cluster are assessed by more than one panel, the quality agency has to ensure sufficient overlap in the panels.
- Training panel members.
- Coordinating the work of the expert panel.

Quality agencies are not obliged in the Netherlands to be EQAR registered.

## NQA

NQA is an independent, private organisation, owned since 2008 by Dr. E. Schalkwijk, and thus does not receive any financial support from the Dutch government or from any other governmental institution or organisation.

NQA was formally founded in December 2003. NQA originates from the quality department of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences. In accordance with the amended Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research (2002), assessments of degree programmes were to be conducted by independent quality assurance agencies.

NQA is primarily active in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences. NQA and Hobeon are the biggest players in this field. Another quality agency, QANU, covers most of the assessments of existing programmes of Research Universities. QANU is a member of ENQA and EQAR registered (since May 2011).

## NQA'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

The organisation of NQA has a simple flowchart:

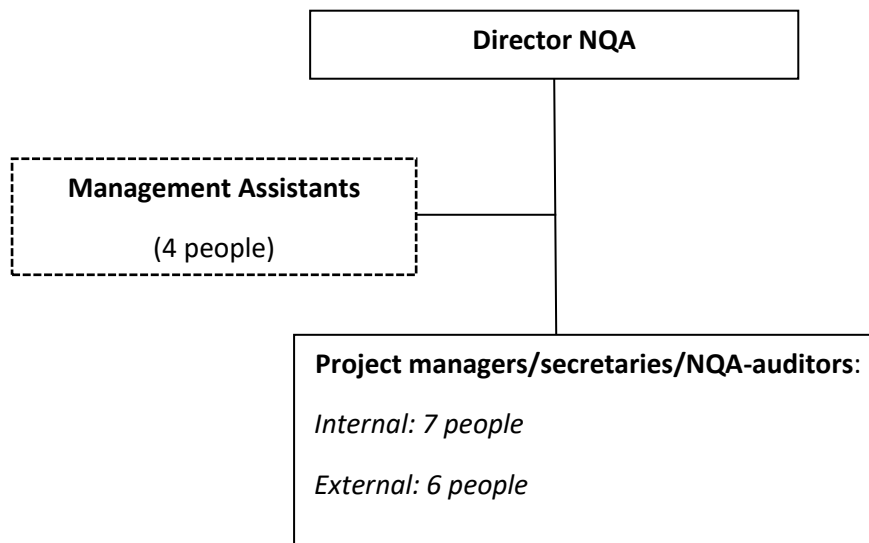


Figure 4: organisation of NQA (as in 2018)

NQA is a relatively small quality agency. The organisation consists of:

- a director who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the organisation
- a secretariat: a team of 4 management assistants that help all the project managers and the Director
- a team of 7 internal project managers who are also the secretaries of the assessment panels
- an external group of 6 project managers to deal with peaks of work in the project calendar

No governing or advisory body, commission or committee is presently placed in the agency.

## NQA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

NQA conducts several activities:

Activities	2013-2017
Assessments of degree programmes	312 assessments including 415 degree programmes
International degree programme assessments	4 assessments including 14 degree programmes
Research evaluations at Universities of Applied Sciences	13 evaluations
EVC-assessments	23 assessments

Figure 5: overview of NQA's activities

**Assessments of degree programmes:** this is NQA's main activity. NVAO publishes periodically a visitation schedule (last update: July 2017) containing the cluster groups and establishing the deadline for institutions to submit an assessment report. NQA organises and co-ordinates many of these assessments for Universities of Applied Sciences.

### **International degree programme assessments:**

The international assessments have up until now been limited to the assessments of degree programmes at the University of the Netherlands Antilles in 2017. These programmes are obliged (by their government) to comply with the Dutch regulations for external quality assurance. These assessments are carried out according to the same framework as the assessments in the Netherlands. The outcomes of these assessments may lead to a certification by NVAO of the quality of the programmes involved, however these programmes are not formally accredited.

### **Evaluation of practice-based research at Universities of Applied Sciences**

Since 2007, the Universities of Applied Sciences work together to safeguard the quality of their applied research activities. Since 2010, they are themselves responsible for ensuring the quality of their research. The umbrella organisation (Vereniging Hogescholen) has developed a protocol for these evaluations, which are conducted by an independent external panel. The Branch-protocol Quality Assurance Research first came into practice in 2009 and was revised in 2015. The protocol describes in detail the procedures, the desired requirements of the members of the expert panel, the standards for the assessment including the criteria.

NQA organises and coordinates such research evaluations. NQA has adopted the requirements of the Protocol in a Guidebook Evaluation Research units, which includes information (incl. requirements) regarding the process of panel composition, the self-evaluation by the research unit, the site-visit and the process concerning the report of the panel.

The assessment includes the following phases:

- the research unit draws up a self-evaluation report;
- the expert panel visits the research unit (site-visit);
- the expert panel draws up a report.

NQA secretaries/project managers support the expert panels in these assessment procedures.

Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands may not legally offer PhD programmes, they are exclusively offered by Research Universities. Evaluation of research offered by Universities of Applied Science is therefore primarily focusing on the research itself and thus these activities are not within the scope of the ESG.

### **EVC- Audits:**

EVC stands for earlier obtained competencies (in Dutch: Eerder Verworven Competenties). These certificates represent the value of the working experience of a candidate in comparison to the qualifications of an official degree.

NQA is one of three agencies appointed by the National Knowledge Centre EVC (NKC-EVC) allowed to assess EVC providers, following the quality standard EVC Code 2.0.

Only those EVC providers that have received a positive evaluation can be registered in the national register of the NKC-EVC. Thus, only an assessment carried out by one of the three agencies can lead to a registration of an EVC provider.

Certificates issued by EVC providers are not part of higher education qualifications, but can be equivalent to higher education qualifications.

The EVC audit carried out by NQA includes the following phases:

- Self-assessment report: the EVC-provider has to draw up a self-evaluation report in which they describe their compliance with the code.
- Site visit: During an EVC-audit, the auditor(s) assess whether the assessment-instrument of the provider meets the requirements of the EVC-code 2.0.
- Final report: The assessment results are presented in a report drawn up by the NQA assessor.

There are two types of assessments: one for initial applicants and one for re-assessments.

- The audit for initial applicants is focused on professionalism and integrity of the organization that wants to be recognized as an EVC-provider and on its work processes.
- The re-assessment has a broader focus including aspects as the functioning, guidance and assessment of assessors and the internal quality assurance. An important element in the re-assessment is the check on the awarded certificates.

NQA has only assessed providers of NLQF /EQF levels 2-3-4. In consequence, it is outside the scope of this Review.

#### **Other types of assessments (part of portfolio published on NQA website):**

##### **NQA hallmark for study programmes**

NQA offers to assess components of study programmes like minors, courses and tracks. A certificate for these study routes is an education hallmark. NQA's assessment is based on nationally applicable assessment frameworks but it also considers the quality norms and demands stemming from external accountability towards target groups, stakeholders and providers of funding. Until now no applications for a NQA hallmark have been made. There are no assessment criteria yet developed by NQA nor procedures in place. As explained by NQA, those would be tailor made procedures in case a demand would occur. The panel finds this (potential) activity therefore out of scope of the ESG.

##### **Certification internal audit processes**

NQA offers to conduct assessments on the internal audit process of the institution, based on the existing internal quality assurance system of an institution. A positive outcome of this assessment could lead to a certificate of NQA. Until now NQA has not received any application for a certification of internal audit processes. No criteria or procedures are yet developed. The panel finds this (potential) activity therefore out of scope of the ESG.

#### **Other NQA activities**

NQA uses its knowledge on assessments and audits in higher education for consultancy services. This refers mainly to training or workshops. Occasionally NQA conducts other types of consultancy services such as preparation audit/ training for the institutions that want to undergo an institutional audit or for degree programmes, guiding institutions which want to obtain the official status of an institution for higher education, and contributions on conferences on specific themes, like testing and assessment.

### **Important remark:**

In the Terms of Reference, the following activities have been included:

1. The assessments of degree programmes, including cluster audit visits and meta-analysis;
2. NQA hallmark for study programmes;
3. International assessments;
4. Certification internal audit processes;
5. EVC procedures, as far as qualifications at the higher education levels of the national qualifications framework (NQF) are concerned.

After analysing all the activities of NQA, the panel was convinced that only the assessments of degree programmes (national and international) are within the scope of the ESG. In consequence, the analysis of ESG Part 2 is focused on the assessment of degree programmes.

The main reasons for this limitation of the scope of the assessment are explained in detail above and summarised below:

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Reason</b>
NQA hallmark for study programmes	NQA has not yet conducted this activity.
Certification internal audit processes	NQA has not yet conducted this activity.
Research evaluations	Not included in the Terms of reference. Research evaluations do not include an evaluation of teaching/learning related to any of the three EHEA cycles
EVC-assessments	NQA has only assessed providers of NLQF /EQF levels 2-3-4. In consequence, it is outside the scope of this Review.

### **NQA'S FUNDING**

NQA is a private organisation. Its financial resources solely depend on the income generated by the fees for the assessments of degree programmes and by other activities. In consequence, the yearly financial figures are highly influenced by the visitation schedule, which is regulated by the NVAO.

Looking at the figures below, in the last five years, the assessment of degree programmes represents on average more than 80% of NQA's income. In years of lower assessments (like 2015 and 2016), NQA tends to increase its income by doing more other types of activities such as consultancy or training.

	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Assessment of degree programmes</b>	93.4 %	83.6 %	61.2 %	87.4 %	89.6 %
<b>Research evaluations</b>	2.21 %	2.26%	3.9 %	0.9 %	0.8%
<b>EVC evaluations</b>	0.37 %	0.28%	0.7 %	0.6 %	0.3%
<b>Follow up assessments</b>	0.13 %	4.14%	12.4 %	5.3%	3.0 %
<b>Other activities</b>	3.89 %	9.68%	21.8 %	5.8 %	6.3%

*Figure 6: relative proportion of the income for each activity*



# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF NQA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### Evidence

NQA is a small private quality agency mainly focused on the assessment of programmes at the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in the Netherlands. The accreditation framework of NVAO is the legal base for these assessments. Currently, NQA is working in a competitive environment where five other agencies are currently active in the Netherlands.

Moreover, it uses its knowledge and experience to offer a portfolio of services tied to quality assurance, such as consulting or training activities. These activities are however rather limited.

NQA's mission is defined in the SAR as follows: "It is the mission of NQA to contribute to the continual improvement of the quality of education regarding secondary education, senior secondary vocational education and training (mbo), higher education (professional and research) and company training". Its vision statement on its quality on the website is clear "NQA continually invests in the professionalization of its staff and the substantive standardization of processes. Procedures and working methods are balanced and uniform and guarantee a consistent process and production level. NQA's quality management system is based on a combination of ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and INK (Dutch Quality Institute) and was certified by the ISO 9001:2008 as operating in the domain: consultancy and assessment regarding the quality of education".

During the meetings with the Director of NQA, it was clear that the main activity of the agency is to offer adequate tailor-made services to the Universities of Applied Sciences. As will be explained more in detail in ESG Part 2, these regular activities are well defined. NQA is regarded by its stakeholders as a competent organization that is managed efficiently and effectively. This includes aspects such as management of processes and panels, the running of schedules and the timely delivery of reports.

NQA however does not present a long-term strategic plan. For the ISO-certification NQA presents every year a Management Review, that NQA does not publish.

NQA's current goals for 2018 are mainly centred on an adequate distribution of the assessments among the internal and external secretaries in order to give their clients the best possible service and

on the further improvement of the procedures involved. In this regard, the desire to offer good services is visible throughout the entire organization.

Concerning the dissemination of its experience and knowledge, its public information on the website is very limited, focusing mainly on their offering of services, though without publishing the outcomes and details of those activities.

NQA does not have any internal committees or other bodies where various representatives of the different stakeholders could participate. During the year, the director meets with the representatives of NVAO and sporadically with other agencies (competitors). For each client institution an account manager is appointed, who meets at least once a year with the institution.

Prior to a programme assessment NQA's programme managers meet with people responsible at individual institutions in order to come to an adequate procedure.

During the visit, it was made evident that there is not a calendar of periodic meetings with the representatives of the institutions, students or representatives from the labour market.

### **Analysis**

It was made evident for the panel that NQA's activities of external quality assurance, centred on programme assessments at Universities of Applied Sciences are its main priority. Over the past five years, NQA has coordinated more than 300 of these assessments, involving more than 400 programmes. These activities are its main source of funding and have established NQA as a recognized quality agency in Dutch higher education. Its procedures are well defined and follow the accreditation framework defined by NVAO. NQA clearly undertakes external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG. (see Part 2 for more details).

Due to the requirement of the quality standard ISO 9001, every year the agency produces a document called "Management Review". In this document NQA reflects on the activities completed over the past year and sets goals for the coming year. However, these goals and objectives are not formalized in a publicly available document and cannot be considered as a long term strategic document. The panel considers that NQA should develop a long-term strategy, also contemplating activities such as thematic analyses or in carrying out more international activities. Such a long term strategy should also make clear how NQA's activities can contribute to the continual improvement of the quality of higher education, as is mentioned in its mission statement.

The review panel considers that the involvement of stakeholders in NQA's governance and work is quite limited and mainly focused on developing adequate assessment processes with each individual institution. The fact of it being an organization without the responsibility of taking accreditation decisions and with little influence on the development of the accreditation framework makes it unnecessary to have a committee dealing with these responsibilities. These fall to the Dutch government and NVAO. Although the main task of NQA is to coordinate assessments and to draft the reports, it could benefit from an advisory board to share policies and improvements with the representatives of the institutions. Furthermore, establishing periodic interactions with students and other groups of interest could be helpful to the strategic development of the agency.

Overall, publicly available information on its mission, its goals, objectives, guides and results is limited on NQA's website. As a private organisation in a competitive field, NQA states that it has chosen for a limited communication on specific goals and results on its website. The review panel however

considers that NQA has not been sufficiently proactive in the field of dissemination. Although the assessment reports are published by NVAO after the accreditation decision, NQA could find ways to make the outcomes of the assessments more visible not only for institutions and for NVAO, but also for other groups such as students or employers. NQA has gained a large experience in conducting programme assessments and it could use its web page for dissemination of this experience.

#### **Panel commendations**

The review panel commends the strong desire of service and quality enhancement that NQA wants to offer to the institutions.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends establishing an advisory committee with the participation of different relevant stakeholders.

The review panel recommends the formalization of a strategic plan to reflect on its objectives.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The review panel recommends looking for other ways to increase the dissemination of its outcomes, and of the experience and knowledge of the agency, including the reports produced by the agency.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

### **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

#### **Evidence**

According to the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), NVAO has the authority to decide on accreditation of programmes and institutions of higher education in the Netherlands. In consequence, it is the unique agency legally recognised to take decisions over institutional audits and programme accreditation.

NVAO decides whether an existing programme is (re-)accredited, but it does not conduct the assessments of the existing degree programmes itself. The assessments are carried out by quality assurance agencies, at the request of the institutions.

NQA is a Dutch private quality agency that coordinates such assessments. Considering the number of assessments carried out until now, NQA is recognised by the Universities of Applied Sciences as a quality agency capable of conducting adequate assessments. It is listed as such on the website of the NVAO. The outcome of these programme assessments, the review report is the main source for NVAO to take accreditation decisions.

During the site visit all the stakeholders interviewed (representatives of NVAO, Inspectorate and Heads of Universities of Applied Sciences) recognised the role of NQA as an effective and well-reputed quality assurance agency in the Netherlands.

#### **Analysis**

As other quality agencies in the Netherlands, due to the legal context, NQA does not have any formal legal basis anymore. This legal basis disappeared in a revision of the Dutch education law in 2011. Nevertheless, the review panel considers that NQA is a quality assurance agency whose outcomes are accepted and recognised by competent public authorities in the Netherlands: NVAO, Inspectorate and Universities.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

#### Evidence

In relation to its independence with respect to the government, NQA is a private institution that does not receive funding from the government. Moreover, it has no formal links to the government or to other institutions. As a result, there is no member of the government or universities participating within its governing body.

In the Dutch higher education system the institutions are the formal owners of the panels of experts. In the cluster-audits, the institutions are also involved in the composition of the panels. However, NQA is often asked to compose panels on behalf of the institutions and consult with other quality agencies in case of cluster-assessments. In addition, once the members of the panel have been selected, the panel composition has to be validated by NQA and later approved by NVAO. The independence of the panel members is an important criterion in these validation and approval processes.

In the current accreditation framework, the panel redacts the final report that is sent to NVAO. NQA does not decide on the accreditation of the programmes, the final accreditation decision remains the responsibility of NVAO based on the outcomes of the assessment reports.

As regards this activity, NQA maintains a typical client – contractor relationship with higher education institutions. It does both assessments and from time to time, consultancy services.

#### Analysis

The panel takes into consideration the context in which to analyse this standard. This context includes the particularities of the Dutch higher education system, its legal context, as well as the characteristics of the agency and its organizational structure.

In reference to its independence with respect to the government, NQA is totally independent. It is the opinion of the review panel that there is no direct relationship with the Ministry. There are two main reasons supporting this. First, the agency does not receive funding from the government. Second, there is no participation by any member of the government in NQA.

Regarding the panel of experts, the independence respective to the composition of the panel remains guaranteed through the double check performed by NQA and NVAO, taken into account the independence criteria defined in the accreditation framework. In addition, the independence on the part of each expert is also fostered by its signature to the ethical code. According to the panel

members interviewed, NQA is very proactive regarding independence. Their experience indicated that if NQA perceived any aspect that could compromise that independence, the agency would act promptly, namely by notifying the panel members about those concerns.

However, the panel is aware that all experts come from a pool suggested by the institutions, and there is a generic absence of experts from foreign universities. This could generate a certain lack of independence, due to the fact that most panel members come from the same field and have contacts with the universities of applied sciences. The panel considers that the presence of reviewers from other countries could bring a more extended vision and more prestige to their ongoing assessments. The universities themselves have commented that in some programmes (for example music degrees) the presence of international members has been very welcome.

Neither internal nor external project managers coordinating the assessments have affiliations with the institutions. They ensure operational independence of the procedures that follow the rules set in the accreditation framework. Regarding the activities of the agency, the commercial relationship between agencies and institutions and the desire to adapt to client or to institutional demands, could be a possible challenge for its operational independence. Although the panel did not find evidence that this has been the case in practice, NQA is advised to take this into further consideration.

During the interviews it was clear that NQA attempts to separate as much as possible quality assurance activities from consultancy services, with the latter representing only a small share of its activities. This fact was also recognized by representatives of the institutions that the panel has interviewed. One of the measures adopted to sustain this separation is that staff members involved in assessment activities do not provide consultancy to the same institution. In most of the examples provided to the panel, the consultancy projects were often completed by the Director. However, the size of the agency and the number of staff, who are very interactive and interested in all aspects of the organisation, make that separation difficult. As a result, the panel considers that NQA should be very careful in selecting consultancy tasks. Throughout the interviews, there was no feeling of a lack of independence.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends establishing stricter internal procedures in order to further separate consulting and assessment activities.

The review panel recommends that NQA stresses the importance of including some international experts in the panels to institutions being reviewed (see also 2.4).

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel suggests to NQA to avoid performing consultancy activities to institutions they review, at least during a certain time span, for example within the same review cycle.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

#### Evidence

In the Netherlands, NVAO is the designated body to conduct thematic analysis. A recent evaluation published by the Inspectorate of Education further emphasises this fact. In its report the Inspectorate encourages NVAO to “publish so-called state-of-the-art reports or meso-analysis that reflect developments within clusters”. The Inspectorate also recommends the Ministry to provide resources to support this.

In the site visit meeting with the representatives of NVAO, they explained to the panel that thematic analysis is the responsibility of NVAO. However, they clearly emphasised that the quality agencies are free to do any analysis of the findings of their own assessments.

In this context, NQA has carried out some thematic analyses during the last years. These analyses include eight bachelor programmes in nursing (2012), three bachelor programmes in midwifery (2013) and finally eight master’s programmes in advance nursing practice (2016). In the thematic analyses, other aspects besides the accreditation standards were dealt with by the panel on request of the institutions. However, these reports remain the property of the institutions that ordered them. Therefore, NQA has not published them on its web page. The reports of the assessments of the degree programmes have been published by NVAO after the accreditation decisions have been formalized.

#### Analysis

The review panel has not found evidence that the development of thematic analyses, with outcomes coming from external quality assurance activities, is currently a regular activity performed by NQA. A limited number of thematic analyses have been carried out in the past on request of the institutions involved in specific programme assessments.

The main reasons for not performing thematic analyses are:

- Lack of financial resources for carrying out these activities. NQA only performs a thematic analysis when an institution requests it and funds the report.
- The current legislative context does not facilitate NQA to conduct thematic analysis, with NVAO being the designated body.

Since NQA is a private for-profit company that is entirely dependent for its income on the individual contributions of institutions for the specific tasks, its capacity to perform tasks such as thematic analyses free of charge is rather limited. The fact that the Ministry does not allocate funding for the development of this task, hampers its realizations.

Until now, NQA carried out some thematic analyses commissioned by the institutions and when there was external funding available to support those activities.

Nevertheless, the director and the staff are convinced that NQA has the information and knowledge to do thematic analysis, considering its large experience about assessment procedures at Universities of Applied Sciences but faces limitations regarding the resources (financial and human) available to do it. Such analysis could be helpful for evaluations of the overall accreditation system as well, emphasizing the accountability of the agency towards the quality assurance of higher education.

### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends that NQA includes thematic analysis as a regular activity in its planning.

The review panel recommends using a part of the budget, the experience and knowledge of internal and external secretaries gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct thematic analyses.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

### **ESG 3.5 RESOURCES**

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

### **Evidence**

#### Financial resources

NQA does not receive any form of financial support from the Dutch government or any other institution. The financial resources are mainly generated from the revenues coming from conducted assessments. The incomes from the programme assessments have represented between 60% and 90% of total income of NQA over the last three years.

The review panel had access to the financial reports of the last three years and it was clear that there is sufficient income for NQA to carry out its work. Furthermore, the agency has presented a sound financial situation in the last years, as a result of a careful and efficient management of its activities, even though it faces relevant constraints as the uneven flow of reviews. Its past record indicates that NQA has been able to generate and save sufficient reserves during years of intensive activity to overcome years of low number of reviews. The financial position of the agency indicates that it faces a positive outlook—However, in order to invest more in thematic analyses, NQA should allocate some budget or staff engaged in these activities.

#### Human resources

NQA has a simple fixed structure composed by twelve people of which seven project managers/ secretaries coordinating the assessments. During periods of peak activity, NQA has an additional group of trained external secretaries available that they use to respond to additional needs.

Training is provided to all new secretaries and it is based on a mentoring system, having new employees working along with an experienced colleague. For example, new project managers are being accompanied by an experienced one during all the phases of the assessment process. This continues until it is felt the new employee can carry out all activities autonomously.

A similar introductory programme applies for external project managers as well. As they do not participate in regular team meetings of NQA, they are also invited every year to an update meeting. These meetings are used to share assessment experiences and do also address the most important and relevant developments in quality assurance and accreditation.

## **Analysis**

As far as human resources are concerned, NQA currently has an enthusiastic and experienced staff with great involvement in its activities. Most of them seemed very interested in taking new goals as well as being involved in international activities.

The panel thinks that NQA could do more to keep in contact the internal and external project managers in order to improve consistency in coordinating assessments. Considering the opinion of the managers of institutions and of panel experts, the review panel feels that there are some differences in applying procedures between internal and external secretaries.

Workload unbalances and retirements have had a direct impact on the number of staff and to a significant turnover of staff members. Thus, over the last four years, 2014 -2017, eleven people completed their contract, at the same time NQA has recruited eight new people. The review panel detects a certain risk of loss of knowledge and accumulated experience. With a current staff of twelve people, the review panel found that the agency is very dependent on few experienced staff members, fact that may pose a risk in case they were to leave the organisation.

NQA is aware that its income largely depends on programme assessments. As institutions can choose what agency they contract to conducts these assessments, NQA always tries to offer a professional service. Up to now, these clients have been regular and were perceived as being very satisfied with the experience and performance of NQA.

The review team found evidence that the agency manages its finances responsibly and adequately. The review panel also considers that the long-term outlook in terms of finances is solid. However, and although most of the institutions interviewed expressed their preference for programme assessments over the institutional audit, there is a risk that the system will move towards greater emphasis on institutional audits. Thus, there is a concern, that if institutional accreditation became the norm, programme assessments could be significantly reduced, putting in danger the sustainability of the current business model of quality agencies such as NQA. As a result, NQA should look at new opportunities and possibilities to continue its activities and consider those scenarios in its planning.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends to NQA to look at measures to keep valuable staff members engaged in the organisation during the periods with a low workload.

The panel recommends that NQA increases the interaction between internal and external secretaries.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The review panel suggests that NQA should reflect about diversifying its revenues in order to be prepared for different scenarios regarding the future of programme assessments.

The review panel also suggests that NQA should pay attention to the impacts of uneven flows of work in degree of integration and training of external staff members and the potential risk of loss of experience and cohesiveness.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**



### ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

#### Evidence

NQA has an internal quality assurance policy in place. The system of internal quality assurance is set out in NQA's *'Quality Management document'*, which addresses all its activities. In accordance with the SAR, this document reflects that the assessment of degree programmes is the key activity of NQA. This internal quality system aims to ensure a good performance of the processes of the agency, as well as a commitment towards continuous enhancement. The internal quality assurance system is based on the international standard ISO 9001:2015 and it is externally certified. It ensures the monitoring and continuous improvement of all processes, mainly supported by the information gathered through satisfaction surveys and meetings. All stakeholders, institutions, members of the panels and NQA secretaries participate in these surveys after each assessment. The survey addresses some topics such as the cooperation with the NQA secretary, the site-visit, the functioning of the expert panel and the panel report. It concludes with a question to give a grade for the performed assessment.

The staff member responsible for the internal quality system collects all outcomes and analyses them with the Director of NQA in order to propose measures to improve the aspects considered as requiring improvement.

In regular staff meetings, NQA discusses these measures and relevant topics to the activities of the organization such as major developments in the sector and in the system of accreditation, the functioning of the audit panels, the developments regarding other NQA activities (for example research evaluations and EVC) and other important issues (such as the introduction of the 2016 NVAO Framework or procedures regarding the composition of the panels in cluster visitations).

Once a year, an external certified reviewer carries out an ISO 9001 audit to the agency and produces an auditing report pointing out areas for improvement. The review panel had access to this report, which shows positive results. NQA also organises at least two internal audits each year. Following an internal planning, the agency reviews the following topics in these audits: the leadership, the human and physical resources, the processes and projects, the analysis of the results and the continuous improvement.

#### Analysis

The agency has in place an internal quality system based on an international standard, using both external and internal feedback mechanisms. Considering the small size of the organisation, this internal quality system is well developed.

The external feedback mechanisms are primarily developed and focused upon the direct stakeholders – the institutions, the aim of this feedback being the continuous improvement of programme assessments. According to the SAR, NQA collects feedback of the assessments from the institutes, from the project managers regarding the procedures and the functioning of the panel members, by the account managers through yearly meetings with the institutes representatives. NQA also collects feedback from its panel members (only from the secretaries) and from other stakeholders than the institutes, according to the panel this could be intensified including all panel members.

Regarding the internal feedback, NQA carries out surveys to all panel secretaries about the development of the assessment procedures. In the future, NQA would plan to include all internal quality processes, and not to limit the internal feedback to the assessment procedures.

Although the system seems reasonably well developed for the dimension and breadth of activities developed, the review team considers that some points of internal quality assurance could be improved:

- Regarding the training of internal staff, through the interviews with experts and representatives of higher education's institutions the review panel detected some differences in the skills and work practice of the (internal-external) staff, which could be improved through a training plan.
- Periodical meetings between panel experts for exchange of good practice have been organized but not with all the categories of members – the pool of student members does not have a meeting.
- Although the review panel has no evidence that any staff member has not acted professionally and ethically, the agency has not formally developed a Code of conduct for its internal staff. For panel members, NQA includes the NVAO Code of conduct in its Manual for panel members.
- Periodic communication was also made evident with the universities and other quality agencies, but not as regular with representatives of the Ministry, students or representatives of the labour market.

### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends NQA to reflect about ways to intensify the communication with the authorities and other relevant stakeholders in order to collect greater feedback about procedures and their effectiveness and relevance.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The review panel suggests developing a Code of conduct that could apply for its staff and panel members.

The panel also suggests establishing a tool on the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly to the processes of external quality assurance.

The review panel also considers that the meetings with the Director, to analyse the outcomes of the feedback, could be more formalized. A possible option could be the development of a Quality Committee to deal with these issues.

The review panel also advises NQA to involve panel members more intensively in the internal quality assurance of assessment procedures.

The review panel suggests collecting feedback after finalising the assessment procedure from all panel members as a regular practice.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

#### Evidence

This is the first attempt for NQA to undergo an external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area to gain ENQA's membership and to become EQAR-registered.

The director of NQA explained that this external review has also been regarded as an opportunity to improve the quality of the organization as it is focused more on the content of their daily work, rather than solely on procedural aspects.

#### Analysis

Although to gain ENQA's membership and to join EQAR are not the legal requirements for quality agencies, the review panel has confirmed the commitment of the agency (especially the director and its staff), in following formally and substantively the main aspects of the ESG.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

#### Evidence

The Dutch system of accreditation reflects the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes. It assumes that institutions in general and degree programmes in particular organise effective periodic feedback that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Since 2011, higher education institutions can request NVAO to conduct an institutional audit. The institutional audit assesses the educational vision of an institution and the policies for putting this into practice, including human resources and internal quality assurance.

The institutional audit addresses the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG. The review panel has also taken into account that the assessment frameworks of NVAO comply with the ESG 2.1 and thus address Part 1 of the ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions. (See NVAO- ENQA review 2017<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Review-report-NVAO\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Review-report-NVAO_FINAL.pdf)

NVAO Framework	Institutional audit	ESG Part 1
Standard 1	The institution has a broadly supported educational philosophy and pursues a corresponding policy focused on the internal quality assurance of its education.	ESG 1.1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 2	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.	ESG 1.1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance ESG 1.2. Design and approval of programmes ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification ESG 1.5. Teaching staff ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support ESG 1.8. Public information
Standard 3	The institution systematically evaluates whether the intended policy objectives relating to educational quality are achieved. Relevant stakeholders are involved in this process.	ESG 1.7. Information management ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes ESG 1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance
Standard 4	The institution has a focus on development and works systematically on the improvement of its education.	ESG 1.7. Information management ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes ESG 1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance

A positive result entitles institutions to use a limited framework for the assessments of its degree programmes.

This limited framework consisted of four standards:

NVAO Framework	Limited Framework	ESG Part 1
Standard 1	The intended learning outcomes are compatible with the level and orientation of the study programme and have been geared to the expectations of the job market, the specialist domain and meet international requirements.	ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 2	The study programme, the educational learning environment and the quality of the staff enable incoming students to attain the intended learning outcomes.	ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification ESG 1.5 Teaching staff ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support ESG 1.8 Public information

NVAO Framework	Limited Framework	ESG Part 1
Standard 3	The programme has adopted an adequate assessment system.	ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 4	The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes have been realized.	ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

If an institution does not apply for an institutional audit (or fails to obtain a positive result), its degree programmes are assessed on the basis of the extensive accreditation framework. The extensive framework consisted of eleven standards:

NL Framework	Extensive Framework	ESG Part 1
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.	ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 2	The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.	ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 3	The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.	ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 4	The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.	ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 5	The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.	ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
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.	ESG 1.5 Teaching staff
Standard 7	The accommodation and material facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum.	ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support ESG 1.7 Information management
Standard 8	The tutoring of and provision of information to students are conducive to study progress and tie in with the needs of students.	ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support ESG 1.8 Public information
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.	ESG 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes ESG 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance
Standard 10	The programme has an adequate student assessment system in place.	ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

NL Framework	Extensive Framework	ESG Part 1
Standard 11	The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.	ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

### Analysis

In all NVAO-frameworks (institutional and programme accreditation), coverage of the ESG Part 1 standards is established and perceived as effective.

NQA is conducting all assessments in line with the assessment frameworks of NVAO. In the case of limited programme assessments, the reduced framework does not take in consideration the internal quality assurance in full, because all standards dealing with internal and external quality assurance, monitoring and information management (ESG Part 1) had been assessed in the institutional audit, which is the responsibility of NVAO.

In case of extended programme assessments, the framework takes in consideration the internal quality assurance and all other standards of ESG Part 1. NQA addresses all these standards in an adequate way, as the assessment reports presented to the panel show.

The assessments, based on the reduced programme accreditation framework, do not cover the ESG Part 1 fully. NQA relies on the judgement of NVAO regarding the institutional audits for specific criteria within standard 2.1.

NQA is a passive follower in this respect and does not reflect during its programme assessments in how far specific criteria of Part 1 are really addressed in the assessments. NQA could be more active on this aspect.

### Panel recommendations

The review panel recommends that NQA demonstrates in its procedures and guidelines more the ties between the standards of part 1 ESG and the standards in the programme assessment frameworks, in order to strengthen the awareness of panels and institutes.

The review panel recommends NQA to evaluate in how far the ESG standard 2.1 is effectively addressed during the programme assessments and communicate its findings to the relevant stakeholders.

### Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

### ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

## Evidence

In the Dutch context, as laid down in the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research*, NVAO is the agency responsible for designing the accreditation framework. In this process of designing methodologies, NQA plays the role of stakeholder of NVAO. The representatives of NVAO explained to the review panel that the involvement of NQA in the continuous improvement of methodologies is active and regular.

Once NVAO has approved the framework “Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands”, NQA consequently adopts the framework through its evaluation guidebooks. Currently, these guides are not published on the website, but provided to the clients, and updated periodically. They are:

- “Guidebook Audit visits in Higher Education Limited Study Programme Assessment” addressed to higher education institutions;
- “Manual audit panel for audit visits in Higher Education” aimed to experts;

The Guidebook developed by NQA, begins with a chapter: “*what’s new?*”, where NQA explains the changes from the previous framework, the following chapters explain the process, the audit visit itinerary and phases. Finally, NQA proposes suggestions for writing the self-evaluation report.

Moreover, in its Guidebook NQA expresses that “In its approach to an audit visit, NQA stresses the essence of education offered: the content and the realized competence of graduate students. “NQA considers its focus on content of programmes, rather than on procedures a strong point of its methodology.

Since the introduction of cluster visitations, the composition of panels and the preparation of the assessments have increased the administrative burden both for quality agencies and for institutions, which has been stressed by the representatives of the institutions interviewed during the site visit. The decision to introduce cluster visitations is however not a direct responsibility of NQA.

## Analysis

The review panel concluded that NQA contributes as a direct stakeholder to the ongoing discussions concerning the methodologies for the assessment of programmes and propose improvements in the frameworks, namely in the regular meetings and interactions with NVAO.

NQA supports the aims and objectives of the external quality processes, designed by NVAO. From the point of view of the review panel, another strong point of the agency is the willingness to take into account the needs of the institutions in order to work out an appropriate assessment procedure. For example, in its Guidebook, NQA offers several options for the schedule of the site visit.

Several of the stakeholders interviewed pointed out the flexibility adopted by NQA in the design and implementation of procedures and their willingness to make it as relevant and effective as possible for the institutions and the programmes being reviewed. This is certainly related to its organizational culture focused on clients’ satisfaction. Some stakeholders expressed preference towards more uniformly structured visits in order to promote greater consistency and comparability between the assessments, also regarding the scoring grades. The panel is positive in this respect about the initiative NQA has taken in collaboration with Hobéon to come to a common interpretation of these grades.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel advises NQA to disseminate its experience with the cluster visitations to relevant stakeholders such as NVAO and the Inspectorate for the future evaluation of the present accreditation system.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### **ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

### **Evidence**

As described in NVAO's "Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands" (and translated into "NQA's Guidebook Audit visits in Higher Education"), the accreditation of existing programmes involves the following phases:

#### A Self-evaluation report:

The institution elaborates a self-evaluation report describing the programme's strengths and weaknesses. The self-evaluation report should think over the standards of the assessment framework. In addition to the self-evaluation report, the programme can add other evaluative documents of the programmes.

NQA will make a general screening of several key documents of the programme so that the study programme knows at an early stage if the existing documents are sufficient for the audit visit to move further. As soon as the secretary has validated all documents, it will be made available to the panel members.

The panel can request additional documents and information if so required in order to form an opinion.

#### An Audit visit:

An audit visit for a limited or extended assessment will take between one or two days to complete. Always the audit visit includes talks with students, alumni, teachers, examiners, study programme managers and representatives of the work field.

At the conclusion of the audit visit, the panel provides feedback on the most important conclusions and recommendations for improvement and development to the study programme's management.

#### Report

The findings, considerations and conclusions of the review panel are presented in a report that is delivered within four weeks after the audit visit, for assessments based on the limited framework, and



six weeks for assessments based on the extended framework. The audit visit report closely follows the assessment framework guidelines of NVAO and it contains a substantiated quality assessment per standard and of the entire programme. (See ESG 2.6)

The overall judgement on the programme could be: excellent, good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. In another chapter, the panel may also include suggestions for improvements with respect to each standard.

### Follow-up

In case of positive accreditation decisions, it is the responsibility of the institution to comply with the recommendations received.

When the panel reaches a final conclusion 'unsatisfactory' due to one or more insufficient standards, there are two possible options:

- If the improvement in the shortcomings is possible and feasible within a maximum of two years, the panel may recommend that an improvement period be imposed.

The institution will have an improvement plan assessed by a panel of independent experts; in many cases this may be the panel that has conducted the initial assessment. NQA supports this panel with its task to assess the improvement plan and later on in the assessment to determine if the desired improvements have been realised, the so-called re-assessment. NVAO finally decides on the improvement period. After the improvement period, the programme has to hand over an external review report proving that the shortcomings are adequately dealt with. In most cases (members of) the original panel reassess the programme. NVAO decides on the final accreditation.

- If the improvement of the shortcomings is not possible and feasible within a maximum of two years, the final decision will be unsatisfactory. The final accreditation decision is always 'unsatisfactory' if Standard 1 ('intended learning outcomes') is negative. In that case, an improvement period cannot be granted.

### **Analysis**

The review panel confirms that a self-evaluation, a site-visit of the audit panel and an assessment report are clearly part of the process of external quality assurance done by NQA.

While meeting experts of the panels, the issue of the site visit was brought to the attention of the panel. Sometimes, experts feel that one day is not enough for a thorough visit.

In relation to follow-up activities, it is the responsibility of NVAO to decide on improvement periods. NQA has not included this phase in the accreditation assessment, as in the current framework it is not within its responsibility.

In principle, the same panel will assess whether the improvement has been achieved and NQA will support it. NVAO may nevertheless change its composition. The panel decides on the approach to be adopted in the assessment. The panel also advises the Board of NVAO based on the outcomes of the re-assessment.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel suggests that NQA proposes to NVAO that quality agencies can take a more active role in the follow-up of the conditioned assessments.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

#### **Evidence**

##### The context

In the Netherlands, the ‘Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research’ states that the institutions install a panel to conduct the degree programme assessments. NQA offers assistance to institutions in this composition process.

NVAO defines the requirements for the expertise and independence of audit panel members, these requirements are part of the accreditation framework and are published on the NVAO website. NQA then aims to compose a competent panel according to NVAO requirements. Finally, the composition of the audit panel is submitted to NVAO for approval.

##### Panel selection

Existing programmes are assessed in assessment clusters. NVAO assigns programmes to an assessment cluster. A single panel assesses the entire cluster. For large clusters, several panels may be involved, as long as a sufficient overlap between the panels is guaranteed.

Within this system, different actors are involved in the composition of the panels: the institutions concerned, the quality agency chosen by each institution and NVAO.

The proposal of a panel or panel members can come from the cluster of study programmes, from the agency or from each study programme of the group.

NQA checks or formulates a panel proposal against the criteria of the NVAO and draws up a provisional proposal for an audit panel until the composition is acceptable to all study programmes.

Finally, NQA submits the proposal to NVAO for approval, accompanied by a letter of mandate by the Board of Directors of the institutions.

##### Panel composition

A panel consists of three domain experts and one student member. One of the domain experts will be appointed as chair during the audit visit. The panel will be assisted by a NQA project manager, who will act as the panel’s secretary. The secretary is responsible for the organization, support and supervision of the audit and assessment process and will draft the assessment report.

The role and tasks of the chair and secretary are defined in the “Manual audit panel for audit visits in Higher Education”.

## Training

Once the panel members are appointed, they receive a 'Manual for panel members' that in detail describes the assessment procedure, their tasks and obligations, information on the standards (of the NVAO's Assessment Framework) that are subject in the assessment and the assessment criteria.

Before the site visit, the members of the panel participate in a preliminary meeting where NQA's secretary (project manager) explains the procedures, the role of each member, the behaviour to be adopted during the site visit and possible ways to solve the questions regarding the standards or criteria to be applied.

Since September 2015, all new chairpersons receive a special training in order to be approved by NVAO, but experienced chairpersons will not receive additional training. NVAO is responsible for training of chairs, but NVAO has worked out a train-the-trainer programme in collaboration with the quality agencies so that they can organize the training of the chairs themselves.

## Evaluation

After the site visit, NQA's secretaries evaluate panel members. The items covered in these evaluations are the following: cooperation, subject-matter expertise, skills and attitude during the interviews, ability to focus on and knowledge of the assessment framework. For chairs, the evaluation also addresses their ability to manage the process during interviews and the quality of the de-briefing.

These evaluations can lead to further instructions or additional training of experts. In more extreme cases, after two negative experiences, these negative assessments may also lead to exclusion from NQA's pool of panel members.

## **Analysis**

From 2015 to 2017, NQA has contracted 518 experts.

The composition of the panel is a strong point of the agency, due to the fact that three members are domain field experts, this point being very positively valued by the institutions assessed. NQA has not chosen to make use of its own professional auditors as chair of panels, differently from other quality agencies in the Netherlands.

The review panel confirmed that the presence of international experts in panels was very low (only 21 of 518 experts are foreign experts). One of the reasons for this was the fact that the NVAO criterion only requires "experience in the (international) professional field of the discipline concerned", other reasons presented were the organisational problems such as the cost, language or the difficulty for them to learn the framework. However, given the growing degree of internationalization of Dutch higher education, the international composition of panels seems to be clearly an aspect to be addressed in the future.

NQA selects students in the final years of their studies and with experience at the university level in different committees. All the students interviewed were very involved in the assessments and satisfied with their role during the site visits. Nevertheless, the review panel considers that they could receive more support through training. For example, it could be very valuable to have regular workshops in which students could share their experiences and provide feedback to the agency.

The review panel also identified a significant complexity in the establishment of the panels due to the desired overlap in panels within a cluster of degree programmes. This point was a recurrent complaint

from NQA, experts and institutions assessed. Although the purpose of keeping some consistency is a valuable one, the process of composing panels has become quite cumbersome and time consuming.

The review panel noted that the training of experts is primarily based on the reading of the manual and the accreditation framework, but none of the members received a presential training session. The panel considers that, even though the preliminary visit could cover the questions for experienced members, this preparatory meeting just before the site visit does not seem to be sufficient for panel members or students without prior experience. This limited training was also something noted by some of the stakeholders interviewed. Though they did not consider that there were major shortcomings, they also endorsed the view that this aspect could be strengthened in order to assure consistency in overall judgements of the panels.

Moreover, it also seems to be insufficient regarding the update of experienced reviewers. In fact, NQA has not organised until now any training for experienced members, which creates the risk of routinization and/or some complacency in the implementation of procedures and in quality assurance. These training events could also be a valuable opportunity for panel members to share difficulties and to exchange experiences about the adoption of certain criteria during site visits. These may be particularly relevant in the case of new frameworks or procedures being introduced. The panel welcomes any initiative of NQA to organize sessions with panel members to share experiences.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends the composition of panels with three domain experts.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends to the agency strengthening the training of panel members in different ways, such as training sessions for new members and update sessions for experienced members.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The review panel suggests to the agency to select more international experts, as a way to add innovative points of view and to reflect the growing internationalization of Dutch higher education.

The review panel considers it would be useful to have sessions to share experiences with students as well.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

#### **Evidence**

The criteria set by the NVAO in the assessment framework are main aspects to be taken into account in the judgement of the assessment of degree programmes. The criteria are published on the NVAO

website and are adopted in the 'Guidelines for audit visits of degree programmes' and in the "Manual for panel members" by NQA. All these guides are not available on NQA's website.

For the accreditation of existing programmes, each standard has to be graduated following the criteria explained in the framework. There are four grades for each standard: Excellent, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Likewise, the overall decision of the programme can be: Excellent, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

To assure a consistent interpretation and application of the criteria, NQA discusses them with its panel secretaries and panel members, before the site visit. Moreover, once the report is finished, another panel secretary that has not been involved in the assessment reads the report and assures if the grading is well justified and consistent. NQA has in addition fine-tuned the implementation of the grading system with another quality agency in the field of Universities of Applied Sciences. Since both together cover more than 80% of the programme assessments at Universities of Applied Sciences, this has improved consistency in grading in this area, although the panel feels further improvement is possible.

### **Analysis**

After the interviews with experts and representatives of higher education institutions, there are two points that the review panel would like to highlight.

The experts and managers interviewed commented that the criteria leave much room for interpretation by the panel and that in some cases there are differences in the application of criteria depending on the panel or moreover the secretary. The main concern is focused on the current grading system. Sometimes the differences between good or satisfactory are not justified enough. The representatives of NVAO explained that in the near future they would change this grading system, as this system is causing difficulties and it is not well valued by institutions.

Although the criteria are explained in the guide, the manual for the experts and in the framework, there is limited discussion of these in the preparation of experts (only in the preparatory visit that is regarded as rather short). Thus, the review panel considers that the application of criteria should be a main point in the training of experts (before starting the assessment procedure) and in the discussion prior and after the reviews take place, in order to build a more consolidated and shared view among the reviewers and secretaries.

### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends to the agency strengthening the training of panel members about the application of the criteria and using that experience to build a more robust view about them and further improve consistency.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## **ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

## Evidence

NQA is responsible for writing the reports after the site visit. The panel secretaries (project managers of NQA) are the persons responsible for it. The report has to be accorded by all the panel members.

Once the first draft is ready, based on a 'four eye-principle' another project manager of NQA reads it, in order to enhance the quality and consistency of reports.

After that internal review, the draft report is sent to the institution operating the study programme to be checked for factual inaccuracies. The secretary will amend the draft report (if necessary) and will present a proposal of final report to the panel. If all panel members agree with the assessments contained in the report, this will be made definite. The visit report is signed by the panel chair and the secretary and sent to the institution that includes it in its accreditation application.

NVAO takes the formal accreditation decision.

The reports and the formal accreditation decisions based on them are published only on the website of NVAO. NQA neither publishes a report nor makes any hyperlinking to the website of NVAO on its own website. In the SAR, NQA explained that it was considering creating a web link or, if possible, directing access-link to the NVAO database.

The review panel was provided with a set of reports in English before the site-visit, all of them following the same specific format for organizing the content of the report.

The NQA peer review reports include:

- A summary;
- A short introduction;
- The basic data of the study programme: administrative data and a short outline of the programme;
- The main component of the report: the analysis of each standard that includes evidence, analysis, findings and the judgements;
- The general conclusions: the judgements on the standards of the applicable framework and the conclusion on the overall judgement of the degree programme;
- Recommendations the audit panel draws up;
- Some appendices – these include aspects such as the study programme structure, the final qualifications of the study programme, the quantitative data regarding the study programme, the programme for the site visit, the experts involved. In some examples (provided by NQA), the appendices also included a summary of theses and a declaration of completeness and accuracy of the information.

In general, higher education institutions are satisfied with the quality of the reports. They only regretted that, sometimes, the conclusions of the final meeting in the site visit were more positive than the conclusions in the report, and in some cases, they would like that the arguments could be more explicit. This was also related to the issue of grading, which is not announced at the end of the visit, though is included in the written report. According to institutions, grading was often below the expectations that they had (and the impressions transmitted by the panel during the site visit).

NVAO representatives were positive about the quality of NQA's reports as well. In general, these reports are a sufficient base for an accreditation decision. Only for a limited number of reports, NVAO asked for additional information prior to its decision.

## **Analysis**

The review panel found that the review reports made by NQA were clear and concise in its structure and well written. They contained the relevant elements and were based on clear evidence. The final decision and the recommendations were clearly presented as well in the reports. The reports are in general an adequate basis for an accreditation decision.

The panel advises NQA to include a new paragraph in each report with the good practices identified in the programme being reviewed. In addition, more information could be added in the report about the context and the description of the individual procedure, since these currently are rather short.

The report of the programmes assessed on the limited framework could also include more references to the previous processes, in order to provide an overview of the evolution of the quality of the programme.

Because of the legal arrangement of the Dutch system of external quality assurance, NQA does not publish its reports since NVAO is the designated organisation to publish them, after an accreditation decision is made. Nevertheless, this should not prevent NQA from disseminating the outcomes of the reviews performed by them, for instance by redirecting interested stakeholders to the website of NVAO. This limited dissemination of the reports and outcomes was also noted by several of the stakeholders interviewed, who considered that more should be done in this respect.

### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends to the agency to publish the reports on its own website, once the programme is accredited or to include the link to the NVAO-website, as NQA already enunciates in its SAR.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel proposes to include a new paragraph with the good practices of the institutions, and some references to the previous accreditation or the institutional audit, in order to know the evolution of the quality of the programme.

The review panel suggests to NQA exploring ways to make the main outcomes of the reports more accessible and relevant to students, employers, and other relevant societal actors.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### **Evidence**

In the Dutch accreditation system, a formal appeal procedure is in place against accreditation decision that are based on the assessment reports of quality agencies. However, this appeal procedure is the responsibility of NVAO. NQA has no formal role in this appeal procedure.

NQA's Quality Management document provides the handling of complaints. It differentiates between internal complaints of staff members and external complaints. The procedure for internal complaints is elaborated in NQA's Personnel Manual. NQA does not have any Appeal Commission to deal with complaints and appeals. According to the NQA guidebook External complaints are appointed to the NQA account manager of the institution or the director of NQA. This procedure is not published and institutions did not know it.

The "NQA Guidebook Audit visits in Higher Education" does not include this complaint procedure; neither a procedure is published on the website.

Thus, the review panel has not found any evidence that NQA has in place a formal procedure for complaints of degree programmes assessments.

Although there is no any formal complaints procedure, institutions are able to request a 'hearing both sides' consultation. This procedure involves both parties (institution and panel) through a meeting. The chair of the panel, the secretary, the higher education institution and the director are the participants in those meetings. Those meetings do not include any external or independent member. The aim of NQA is to reach consensus about the assessment. In the past three years three such 'hear both sides' procedures have occurred. In one case, this led to a mutual agreement and understanding; in another, the procedure was withdrawn by the institution. In one case a mutual agreement proved to be impossible and a legal procedure was inevitable.

### **Analysis**

Although NQA is attempting to deal with complaints regarding the outcomes of the panel assessments, this is done in a very informal way. Moreover, there is no involvement of an independent third party that could arbitrate between the higher education institutions, the agency and the review panels.

Thus, when the conciliation attempted by the agency fails, the process needs to move to a legal instance.

NQA should have a complaints' procedure clearly defined as part of the external quality assurance process, this procedure should be included in the Guidebook and communicated to the institutions, for example, published on the website.

In order to handle this procedure in an effective and independent way, a complaints commission could be appointed.

### **Panel recommendations**

The review panel recommends to the agency developing a complaints procedure and communicate it to the institutions. That should include the establishment of an independent and competent commission that may handle any relevant issues.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**



# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review panel commends the strong desire of service and quality enhancement that NQA wants to offer to the institutions.

### ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

The panel commends the composition of panel with three domain experts.

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Partially compliant

- The review panel recommends establishing an advisory committee with the participation of different relevant stakeholders.
- The review panel recommends the formalization of a strategic plan to reflect on its objectives.

### ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Fully compliant

### ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends establishing stricter internal procedures in order to further organise consulting and assessments.
- The review panel recommends that NQA stresses the importance of including some international experts in the panels to institutions being reviewed. (see 2.4)

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Partially compliant

- The review panel recommends that NQA includes thematic analysis as one regular activity in its planning.
- The review panel recommends using a part of the budget and the experience and knowledge of internal and external secretaries gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct those thematic analyses.

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Substantially compliant

- The panel recommends to NQA to look at measures to keep valuable staff members engaged in the organisation during the periods with a low workload.
- The panel recommends that NQA increases the interaction between internal and external secretaries.

### **ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends NQA to reflect about ways to intensify the communication with the authorities and other relevant stakeholders in order to collect greater feedback about procedures and their effectiveness and relevance.

### **ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES**

Fully compliant

#### **ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends that NQA could demonstrate in its procedures and guidelines more the ties between the standards of part 1 ESG and the standards in the programme assessment frameworks, in order to strengthen the awareness of panels and institutes.
- The review panel recommends NQA to evaluate in how far the ESG standard 2.1 is effectively addressed during the programme assessments and communicate its findings to the relevant stakeholders.

#### **ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

Fully compliant

#### **ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Fully compliant

#### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends to the agency strengthening the training of panel members in different ways, such as training sessions for new members and update sessions for experienced members.

#### **ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends to the agency strengthening the training of panel members about the application of the criteria and using that experience to build a more robust view about them and further improve consistency.

#### **ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Substantially compliant

- The review panel recommends to the agency to publish the reports on its own website or to include the link, as NQA already enunciates in its SAR.

#### **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Partially compliant

- The review panel recommends to the agency developing a complaints procedure and communicate it to the institutions. That should include the establishment of an independent and competent commission that may handle any relevant issues.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, NQA is in compliance with the ESG.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to make some suggestions which NQA may wish to consider when reflecting on its further development:

- The review panel recommends looking for other ways to increase the dissemination of its outcomes, and of the experience and knowledge of the agency, including the reports produced by the agency. **(ESG 3.1)**
- The panel suggests to NQA to avoid performing consultancy activities to institutions they review, at least during a certain time span, for example within the same review cycle. **(ESG 3.3)**
- The review panel suggests that NQA should reflect about diversifying its revenues and be prepared for different scenarios regarding the flow of programme evaluations. **(ESG 3.5)**
- The review panel also suggests that NQA should pay attention to the impacts of uneven flows of work in degree of integration and training of external staff members and the potential risk of loss of experience and cohesiveness. **(ESG 3.5)**
- The review panel suggests developing a Code of conduct that could apply for its staff and panel members. **(ESG 3.6)**
- The panel also suggests establishing a tool on the web page to collect suggestions or consulting of students, teachers, or society not linked directly to the processes of external quality assurance. **(ESG 3.6)**
- The review panel also considers that the meetings with the Director, to analyse the outcomes of the feedback, could be more formalized and include the participation of other staff members. A possible option could be the development of a Quality Committee to deal with these issues. **(ESG 3.6)**
- The review panel also advises NQA to involve panel members more intensively in the internal quality assurance of assessment procedures. **(ESG 3.6)**
- The review panel suggests collecting feedback after finalising the assessment procedure from all panel members as a regular practice. **(ESG 3.6)**
- The panel advises NQA to disseminate its experience with the cluster visitations to relevant stakeholders such as NVAO and the Inspectorate for the future evaluation of the present accreditation system. **(ESG 2.2)**
- The panel recommends that NQA proposes to NVAO that quality agencies can take a more active role in the follow-up of the conditioned assessments. **(ESG 2.3)**
- The review panel suggests the agency to select more international experts, as a way to add innovative points of view and to reflect the growing internationalization of Dutch higher education. **(ESG 2.4)**

- The review panel considers it would be useful to have sessions to share experiences with students as well. **(ESG 2.4)**
- The panel proposes to include a new paragraph with the good practices of the institutions, and some references to the previous accreditation or the institutional audit, in order to know the evolution of the programme. **(ESG 2.6)**
- The review panel suggests to NQA exploring ways to make the main outcomes of the reports more accessible and relevant to students, employers, and other relevant societal actors. **(ESG 2.6)**

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

[25.02.2018]		
As necessary	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I A pre-visit meeting with the agency contact person to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)	
[26.02.2018]		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09.00-10.00	Meeting with the CEO and the chair of the Board (or equivalent)	1. drs. Paul Thijssen, Director
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
10.15 -11.00	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	1. Peter van Achteren LLB, project manager NQA 2. Merijn Snel BHRM BEd, project manager NQA
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
11.15 -12.00	Meeting with representatives of NVAO (Accreditation organisation Netherlands and Flanders)	1. drs. R.P. (Paul) Zevenbergen: member of the Executive Board NVAO 2. Henri Ponds: Policy Advisor NVAO Netherlands
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
12.15 -13.00	Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of evaluations (focus on assessment of degree programmes)	1. drs. Mark Fokkema, project manager NQA 2. Carry Bomhof MOC, project manager NQA 3. ir. Alfons Hoitink, project manager NQA 4. drs. Nel Göbel, external project manager 5. drs. Marieke Schoots, external project manager 6. Merijn Snel BHRM BEd, project manager NQA 7. Peter van Achteren LLB, project manager NQA
13.00-14.15	Lunch (panel only)	
14.15-15.00	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	1. drs. B.W. (Bas) Bauland -Senior Advisor Quality Assurance at HAN University of Applied Sciences 2. ir. A. (Alma) Mulder -Policy Advisor Finance & Control, NHL University of Applied Sciences 3. Frits Kamps: - Auditor team Audit & Accreditation Education and Research at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences 4. ir. B.J.J. (Bartjan Wattel): -Head of the department Education and Quality, HZ University of Applied
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
15.15 -16.00 minutes	Meeting with executive board members of HEI's	1. drs. P.L.A. (Paul) Rüpp: Chair of the Executive Board of Avans University of Applied Sciences 2. dr. C.P. (Kees) Boele: Chair of the Executive Board HAN University of Applied Sciences 3. dr. K. (Kitty) Kwakman: Vice President and member of the Board of Governors Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. 4. ir. A.P. (Adri) de Buck: Chair of the Executive Board HZ University of Applied Sciences 5. drs. K.W. (Klaas-Wybo) van der Hoek: Member of the Executive Board of NHL/Stenden UAS
16.00-18.00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	
20.00	Dinner (panel only)	Reservations made for "Oudaen"

[27.02.2018]		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09.15-10.00	Meeting with the key staff of the agency (focus on EVC procedures, NQA hallmark; International assessments; certification internal audit processes, research evaluations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. drs. Paul Thijssen</li> <li>2. Peter van Achteren LLB</li> <li>3. Merijn Snel BHRM Bed</li> </ol>
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
10.15 -11.00	Meeting with representatives of reviewed degree programmes and research units of HEI's (Universities of Applied Sciences)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Frank Vonk MA, PhD: researcher HAN UAS</li> <li>2. Natasja Nova: representatieve bachelor programme Public Administration – Avans UAS)</li> <li>3. Marianne Roes: representatieve bachelor programme Dental Hygiene – HAN UAS</li> </ol>
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
11.15 -12.00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool (focus on the assessments of degree programmes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ir. I.F. (Ynte) van der Meer (domain expert)</li> <li>2. drs. D.W. (Dennis) Righters MBA (domain expert)</li> <li>3. ing. R.J.H. (Ron) Tolido (domain expert)</li> <li>4. dr. B. (Bob) Koster (domain expert)</li> <li>5. L.H. (Leo) Broekhuizen MBA (domain expert)</li> </ol>
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
12.15 -13.00	Meeting with representatives of the professional field/advisory committees	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. drs. M.C.J.S. (Marie-Christine) Smit</li> <li>2. M.J. Reijven MBA MRIC, RVGME</li> </ol>
12.45-14.00	Lunch (panel only)	
14.15-15.00	Meeting with representative of Inspectorate of Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. drs. M. (Martine) Pol-Neefs</li> </ol>
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
15.15 -16.00	Meeting with students' representatives from the reviewers' pool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lonneke Fuhler</li> <li>2. Joachim Miedema</li> <li>3. Loek van der Linde</li> </ol>
16.00-18.00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	
20.00	Dinner (panel only)	Reservations made for "Florent"
[27.02.2018]		
TIMING	TOPIC	Persons for interview
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paul Thijssen</li> <li>2. Peter van Achteren</li> </ol>
10.00 – 11.30	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
11.30 – 12.30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and council/board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch	

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

### Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

June 2017

#### **1. Background and Context**

Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) is a quality assurance agency based in Utrecht, in the centre of the Netherlands. NQA focuses on providing services to (mainly) institutions of higher professional education. As a(n) (external) quality assurance agency, NQA particularly organizes and co-ordinates assessments of degree programmes on the basis of the formal accreditation framework that has been established by the relevant authorities, the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science and the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO).

NQA originates from the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Science (in Dutch: 'Vereniging Hogescholen'). In accordance with the amended Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research (2002), assessments of (existing) degree programmes were to be conducted by independent quality assurance agencies. Subsequently, NQA was formally founded December 2003. Since the foundation NQA has performed over 800 assessments of degree programmes (associate degree, bachelor, master) of (mainly) institutions of higher professional education. The results of these assessments are laid down in a report that institutions/educational programmes use to get re-accredited by NVAO.

Assessments are the solid key objective of the activities of NQA. In addition, the company offers a variety of consultancy and training services. Clients of these services are mainly institutions of higher professional education, although also some other (educational) institutions use these services of NQA.

This (first time) application of NQA for the ENQA membership and registration on EQAR focuses on the assessment (audit/evaluation) activities. A thorough (ENQA) review of this cannot be done without a proper view of the Dutch system of higher education and the system of external quality control. An extensive description will be part of the NQA self-assessment report (SAR). In the meantime, we would like to refer to a description by EP Nuffic that gives an introduction to these two elements:

#### **Higher education in the Netherlands**

Higher education in the Netherlands is offered at two types of institutions: Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. Research Universities include general universities, universities specialising in engineering and agriculture, and the Open University. Universities of Applied Sciences include general institutions as well as institutions specialising in a specific field such as agriculture, fine and performing arts or teacher training. Whereas Research Universities are primarily responsible for offering research-oriented programmes, Universities of Applied Sciences are primarily responsible for offering programmes of higher professional education, which prepare students for specific professions. These tend to be more practice oriented than programmes offered by research universities.

In this binary, three-cycle system, bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees are awarded. Short-cycle higher education leading to the associate's degree is offered by Universities of Applied Sciences. Degree programmes and periods of study are quantified in terms of the ECTS credit system.

### **System of external quality assurance**

A guaranteed standard of higher education, and alignment with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, is maintained through a system of legal regulation and quality assurance, in the form of accreditation. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for legislation pertaining to education. The agriculture and public health ministries play an important role in monitoring the content of study programmes in their respective fields. Quality assurance is carried out through a system of accreditation, administered by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). According to the Dutch Higher Education Act, all degree programmes offered by Research Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences must be evaluated according to established criteria. Programmes that meet the criteria are accredited: i.e. recognised for a period of six years. Only accredited programmes are eligible for government funding; students receive financial aid and graduate with a recognised degree only when enrolled in, and after having completed, an accredited degree programme. All accredited programmes are listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO).

Since January 2011, the Netherlands has a new accreditation system. The process described above still applies, but beginning in 2011, higher education institutions can request the NVAO to conduct an 'institutional quality assessment' to determine the extent to which the institution is capable of guaranteeing the quality of the programmes it offers. Programmes offered by institutions that receive a positive evaluation still have to be accredited, but the accreditation procedure takes less time and is not as extensive. The latest developments in the system of accreditation will be effective by the end of 2017. The SAR of NQA will describe these newest adjustments.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent NQA fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of NQA should be granted and to EQAR to support NQA application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

### **2.1 Activities of NQA within the scope of the ESG**

In order for NQA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of NQA that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of NQA have to be addressed in the external review:

1. The assessments of degree programmes, including cluster audit visits and meta-analysis;
2. NQA hallmark for study programmes;
3. International assessments;
4. Certification internal audit processes;



5. EVC procedures, as far as qualifications at the higher education levels of the national qualifications framework (NQF) are concerned.

The NQA's self-assessment report and the external review report should also address the way in which NQA separates between consultancy and quality assurance, in particular in relation to the activity *support in applying for accreditation*.

### **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by NQA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to NQA;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide NQA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards NQA review.

#### **3.2 Self-assessment by NQA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

NQA is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which NQA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

NQA will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to NQA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by NQA in arriving in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the granting or reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to NQA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If NQA chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by NQA, finalise the document and submit it to NQA and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

NQA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which NQA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

#### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

NQA will consider the expert panel’s report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. NQA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board’s decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by NQA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### **5. Use of the report**

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether NQA has met the ESG and can be thus admitted as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to NQA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by NQA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. NQA may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

#### **6. Budget**

NQA shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR

Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, NQA will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to NQA if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

#### **7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

Agreement on terms of reference	June 2017
Appointment of review panel members	October/November 2017
Self-assessment completed	September/October 2017
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	November 2017
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2017
Briefing of review panel members	January 2018
Review panel site visit	February 2018
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	April 2018
Draft of evaluation report to NQA	May 2018
Statement of NQA to review panel if necessary	May 2018
Submission of final report to ENQA	June 2018
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of NQA	September 2018
Publication of the report	September/October 2018

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

EC	European Credit
EHEA	European Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQF	European Qualification Framework
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EVC	Earlier obtained competencies (in Dutch: eerder verworven competenties)
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NQA	Netherlands Quality Agency
NL	The Netherlands
NLQF	Dutch Qualification Framework
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
QA	Quality Assurance
QANU	Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities
SAR	Self-assessment Report

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY NQA

#### Together with the SAR:

- Guidebook Audit visits in Higher Education – Limited Study Programme Assessment – NQA, 2017
- Manual audit panel for audit visits in Higher Education - NQA , 2017
- Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands – NVAO, 2016
- Brancheprotocol Kwaliteitszorg Onderzoek 2016– 2022 - Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015 (in Dutch)
- Normtekst EVC Kwaliteitscode 2.0- EVC -2016 (*in Dutch*)
- *Report 2016: Bachelor of Music – Zuyd Hogeschool*
- Report 2016: Bachelor programme International Business and Language – Stenden Hogeschool
- *Report 2017: Master degree programme Facility and Real Estate Management – Saxion UAS*

The panel requested additional evidences about some topics. NQA sent to the panel the following reports:

- About organization, including
  - Organisation chart
  - the Statutes (2007) (*in Dutch*)
  - NQA Staff Handbook (*in Dutch*)
  - NQA Terms of Employment (*in Dutch*)
  - *Report-Directors assessment (in Dutch: directiebeoordeling)*
- About finances
- About independence
- About experts
- About methodology, including three examples of follow up reports
  - The Hague University of Applied Sciences –MBA
  - NHL University of Applied Sciences –Industrial Engineering and Management
  - Hanze University of Applied Sciences - –MBA
- About thematic analysis, including three examples Metaanalysis performed from 2012 to 2017 (*in Dutch*):
  - Meta-analysis Report 8 bachelors of Nursing (2012)
  - Meta-analysis 3 bachelors Midwifery (2013)
  - Meta-analysis 8 masters Advanced Nursing Practice (2016), in consultation with Hóbeon

### OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL NQA

[www.nqa.nl](http://www.nqa.nl)

[www.nvao.nl](http://www.nvao.nl)

[www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl)



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA), undertaken in 2018.

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**2018 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**