

New paths

Annual Report 2012 Summary



New paths

NVAO Annual Report 2012
Summary



Introduction

In 2012 the focus was directed towards improving quality. The Flemish government developed a new accreditation system. In the Netherlands, measures for improvement were launched in the professional higher education sector after the perils surrounding diplomas came to light. At many levels, initiatives were unfurled for likely distinctive features and the institutions prepared themselves for the institutional quality assurance audit.

Back at NVAO, two members of the Executive Board stood down; the Committee of Ministers appointed new board members and a new chairperson and vice chairperson. Internally, intensive work has been done on the international external review – with a positive completion, various (international) projects and the implementation of IT updates.

In higher education in the Netherlands, not only are the intensified focus on the panel composition and the selection of discussion partners and final projects bearing fruit, so are the improvements in the accreditation system itself. The possibilities for differentiation in the assessments and the improvement periods are being utilised. The assessment of new programmes and the institutional audit are appreciated. The quality of the panels and the reports is increasing. In Flemish higher education, calls for innovation from society are growing, higher requirements are being set for programmes and new educational levels (HBO5) and a new accreditation system are ready to be launched.

NVAO would like to thank its former board members and former employees – and particularly the programmes, institutions, teachers and students, panels, quality assessment agencies, secretaries, panel members, quality assurance employees, administrators, policymakers and others involved in quality assurance – for all their efforts over the last year to give further shape to the quality-oriented culture in higher education in Flanders and the Netherlands.

**Anne Flierman, Ann Demeulemeester, Lucien Bollaert
and Paul Zevenbergen**

Executive Board

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Chapter 1

New Paths

'The improvement period might look like a relaxation in requirements, but it has led to more clearly defined assessments.'

Paul Zevenbergen, NVAO board member

In recent years, Dutch higher education has shown that quality has been made a top priority. An increased awareness of quality is apparent both at institutions and within programmes. The institutions that were confronted with stricter measures are taking great pains to make the necessary improvements. To secure the changes being made, NVAO has established a number of improvement plans. The interim assessments at the programmes concerned provide confidence; the final assessments will show next year whether the improvements have actually been achieved.

In Flemish higher education, extra measures were not required. Yet calls for innovation from society are growing and higher requirements are being set for the programmes. This is manifested in greater attention being given to research skills and increased reflection within the programme. It is a challenge to give shape to the continuum – from fundamental research, via practice-orientated research, to activity research. The associations and institutions deal with this differently. The necessity of having an initial accreditation policy is accepted, but has not yet been completed or consistently implemented everywhere.

Developments in the accreditation systems

The initial results of the second Dutch accreditation system indicate that the intended outcomes have been achieved. The possibility of improvement for programmes leads to more clearly defined panel assessments. NVAO has established various improvement plans. Awareness of the importance of (having) a quality-oriented culture has increased considerably.

The programme assessments and institutional audits are getting off the ground now that the old system has been phased out. At the programme level, the external assessment is viewed more as a good discussion between peers. The same is true at the board level for the discussion partners in respect of the institutional audit for which the institutions thoroughly prepare themselves. One point of focus is the period esta-

blished by law when conditions are set for the assessment, particularly for the institutional audit. Within one year, the institution must show – by receiving a positive panel assessment – that it has met the conditions set; that is a very short period within which to accomplish this.

The tightened stipulations that NVAO has introduced to the requirements for the composition of the panel and to the selection of the discussion partners and final projects to be assessed are effective, according to the institutions, the experts that participate in the panels and the Dutch quality assessment agencies. The manner in which the external assessment is conducted is viewed as being more independent and the panels' assessments are more critical, partly due to the possibility of recommending a period for improvement. The improvement period might look like a relaxation in requirements, but it has led – as NVAO expected it would – to more clearly defined assessments.

The next accreditation system in Flanders will be introduced at the commencement of the 2013-2014 academic year. The most important change from the first system is the introduction of a limited assessment of the programmes, linked to a mandatory institutional review for registered institutions. The limited programme framework has three generic quality guarantees (standards). The programmes must provide more factual data with their accreditation application. The first standard for the intended learning outcomes is issued at least one year in advance via the subject/discipline-specific learning outcomes that NVAO validates in the Flemish qualification structure. The external assessment itself returns to the heart of the matter, the triangle between teacher, student and the learning environment. That is where education takes place and also where its quality can be found.

The Flemish institutional review assesses the manner in which the institution meets the (inter)national social requirements for higher education by (controlling) the quality of its education. The framework gives a number of themes for this that serve as points of focus during the audit, such as sustainability, diversity, participation and internationalisation. The presence of and attention given to a quality-oriented culture are a focus running through all standards. The institutional review is conducted by international panel members. For this, NVAO makes use of its pool of international experts it has built up through its international contacts. Before the start of the institutional review, Flanders will conduct baseline measurements in the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years. The institutions and associations are currently already preparing for this.

‘In addition to focusing on assessing quality, NVAO also focuses on encouraging a quality-oriented culture.’

Ann Demeulemeester, NVAO vice chairperson

A third important change in the new system is the fact that it is now NVAO, rather than the Flemish government, that takes the decision on the improvement period.

Positive result for external review

In the summer of 2012, NVAO was inspected by an external, international and independent panel of experts. The inspection had a positive outcome. In September 2012, the review panel assessed in its final report that NVAO meets the *European Standards and Guidelines*.

NVAO should meet these European guidelines, as a quality assurance organisation, to be and remain a fully fledged member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and (again) to be registered on the independent European register of quality assurance agencies (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR). ENQA has renewed the membership of NVAO for five years and, at the end of 2012, EQAR announced that NVAO's registration on its register had been renewed.

NVAO will inform ENQA at the end of 2014 about the improvements made with regard to system-wide analyses and the improvement of the consistency in panel assessments by introducing the possibility of clustered assessments of programmes in the Netherlands as well. This last point depends on legal decision-making.

New strategy

In 2012, NVAO started developing a new policy strategy for the coming four years. In addition to assessing future-oriented quality assurance within institutions and the results of programmes based on past performance, NVAO will also focus on promoting a quality-oriented culture in higher education and international cooperation. The goal here is to facilitate institutions and programmes: they remain the primary ones responsible for the quality of the education provided and the manner in which this is achieved.

NVAO has translated its key tasks into strategic agenda points and priorities (see box). The positioning of NVAO corresponds with the ambitions of the Dutch and Flemish governments, higher education institutions, students, teachers and employers to provide the best possible higher education to a broad range of students in a rapidly developing environment and labour market. External quality assurance should foster these ambitions. In 2013, the strategic choices will be translated into operational goals in the primary and secondary organisation processes.

‘The external assessment in the new Flemish accreditation system returns to the heart of the matter, the triangle between teacher, student and the learning environment. That is where education takes place and also where its quality can be found.

Lucien Bollaert, member of NVAO Board

Expectations for 2013

With the exception of the Nautical College and the art programmes provided by a “School of Arts” attached to a university college, the Master’s programmes at the Flemish university colleges will be embedded in the universities in 2013 (**embedding in research**). Preparing for this was not easy for the programmes. NVAO launched many follow-up plans to gain substantiated confidence that, by that time, the programmes will be up to standard in academic terms. The balance between professional and academic orientation will remain a challenge after the integration, also because university colleges will continue to be given the task of conducting practice-oriented scientific research.

The **Associate Degree programmes** are expected to be an official part of higher education in the Netherlands from the end of 2013. NVAO is developing a new assessment framework for this. Until that time, the Associate Degree programmes have a temporary status.

In 2013, the Flemish government is preparing a legislative Act to strengthen professional higher education, the new **HB05 programmes**.

The Flemish government has consented to the **extension of the programme length** for Master’s programmes when longer programmes are required with a view to the (inter)national labour market or the further development in a research environment (doctorates, R&D conducted by companies). In 2013, universities and university colleges can submit an application for extending the length of their Master’s programmes with NVAO.

For **NVAO itself**, 2013 will be a busy year. The new management team is fleshing out the policy strategy, the majority of the Dutch institutional audits are taking place, the applications for programme length extensions can be submitted to NVAO and an information round will be held on the new Flemish accreditation system with the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the VLUHR. At the same time, there will be an increased call on the analytical and reflection capacities of NVAO to come up with good analyses and recommendations beyond the perspective of education. NVAO is expanding its system of broad analysis and, in this effort, has begun in two subjects/disciplines.

Chapter 2

Key Tasks of NVAO

2.1 / General

In 2012 the number of “simple” assessments conducted by NVAO of Dutch and Flemish programmes and Dutch research Master’s programmes decreased, while the number of institutional audits and specific quality issues rose (see paragraph 2.5 Tables). NVAO is increasingly providing recommendations or carrying out individual assessment plans for the Dutch and Flemish governments. Revisions to Dutch and Flemish legislative Acts are also being complied with.

2.2 / New accreditation systems

The experiences with the new Dutch accreditation system are encouraging. Institutions, programmes and panel members have said that the discussions during the site visit are appreciated, particularly during the programme assessment and during the institutional quality assurance audit.

The institutions experience the audits as intensive and valuable. They prepare themselves well for them, which is something in itself that has an encouraging effect. In 2012, the audit panels visited nearly ten institutions and NVAO was able to award five institutions a positive decision, two of which were awarded “under conditions”. Two negative panel recommendations were also issued. In the coming year, the decision-making on the remaining five audits will be completed and the other institutions that have applied will be visited.

NVAO trusts the assessment of the panels and does not repeat their work. The panels are less hesitant to recommend ‘unsatisfactory’ or improvements. NVAO can better substantiate its assessment, has to ask fewer additional questions and seldom has to carry out verification assessments. Prior to the external assessment, NVAO assesses the panel composition and the secretaries/process coordinators for the panels and the potential panel chairpersons for the institutional audit are trained and certified. This has improved the quality of the assessment reports.

Composition of panels for accreditation

Prior to the assessment of a current programme (accreditation), NVAO must consent to the composition of the panel of experts (WHW, Article 5a.2, second paragraph). NVAO assesses whether the panels have the necessary expertise and are independent.

NVAO has established that, in 99 per cent of the cases, the panel is put together by a Dutch quality assessment agency. Institutions and programmes make little use of the possibility to organise their own external assessments. The wide-spread use of this possibility would, however, make clustered assessments difficult.

Approximately one-fourth of the panels presented appeared to be problematic. In these cases, NVAO asked for missing documents to ensure the nomination met the administrative requirements or asked for further (more convincing) substantiation or the panel was changed after NVAO had indicated it could not agree to the proposal. Changes in the panel were primarily aimed at strengthening the international and educational expertise in panels for the assessment of Bachelor’s programmes (professional orientation). In several cases, there was a problem with the independence of a panel member and the panel member in question was replaced for that reason. After the changes were made, NVAO consented to all the proposed panels.

NVAO pointed out that the quality of the panels could improve further. Some of the Dutch quality assessment agencies call in professional auditors. This has demonstrably led to fewer subject/discipline experts on a panel, compared to panels composed by Dutch quality assessment agencies entirely of peers. Furthermore, the educational expertise of the panels can be improved by including more teachers with particular expertise in conducting assessments. Finally, the expertise in the professional field can be strengthened in the panels assessing academic programmes. The panels are well informed about the requirements that the professional field sets for graduates of programmes, but these panels still often lack real role models from professional practice.

Total number of proposed panel compositions*

Completed as of 31 December				
	Number of panels	Number of institutions involved	Number of programmes involved	Number of Dutch quality assessment agencies involved
> Professional HE	142	45	184	7
> Academic HE	166	19	491	5
> Total	308	64	675	12

* This concerns the number of panels deployed for each institution. The deployment can also involve several programmes, such as a Bachelor's programme and a subsequent Master's programme. As a result, the number of programmes involved is higher than the number of panels proposed. Two panels are nominated for programmes with a post-graduate programme. A large number of Bachelor's programmes have been merged via a planning-neutral conversion into an expanded programme. In some cases, the number of programmes involved equals the outcome of the conversion instead of the number of current CROHO registrations.

NVAO expects that the resolutions in the legislative bill on strengthening the quality guarantees in higher education (*Wetsvoorstel versterking kwaliteitswaarborgen hoger onderwijs*) could lead to further improvement in the system. This could positively affect the clustered assessment of professional higher education programmes and the appointment of panel members by NVAO, such that the financial tie between the institution or programme and the Dutch quality assessment agency is removed.

In 2012, NVAO proposed to the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science that the transition period for the institutional quality assurance audit be extended by a year. Currently, institutions must have passed the institutional audit before the end of 2013 in order to remain eligible for the limited programme assessment and this is a very short period within which to accomplish this. Next year it will become clear whether the period can be extended.

For the development of the new Flemish accreditation system, NVAO has for some time been holding structural consultations with the Flemish government and the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR). In 2012 the

Flemish Government ratified the legislative Act amending the Act of 4 April 2003 concerning the restructuring of higher education in Flanders, which revised the system of quality assurance and accreditation – i.e. the NAS Act. The Act demonstrates that the focus in the next Flemish system will be aimed at the substantive assessment of the programme. Promoting a quality-oriented culture within the institutions is important, but the programme assessment remains the cornerstone of the system. The system is also aiming at international legitimacy (*European Standards and Guidelines*); a substantial reduction of the accreditation load and more accessible information for students choosing programmes and other stakeholders.

In 2012, NVAO presented the accreditation framework for existing programmes and the initial accreditation framework for new programmes to the Flemish government, which converted them into decisions at the start of 2013. Beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year, the standards for assessment of (new) programmes will be limited and, starting with the 2015-2016 academic year, the institutional review will be introduced, initially as a baseline measurement.

The NAS Act also introduced several changes immediately. The requirement of holding a hearing in the case of doubt was rescinded, such that NVAO can now ask for additional information orally and in writing from the assessment panel and the programme. The initial experiences with this have been positive.

2.3 / Distinctive (quality) features

Up to now, NVAO has granted a distinctive (quality) feature to 62 Dutch programmes and to 14 Flemish programmes. This feature offers institutions the possibility to profile themselves with aspects that are related to orientation (such as *research Master's programmes*), with specific objectives (*internationalisation*) or with a residential character (*small-scale and intensive education*). Last year, NVAO conducted a pilot project for the new distinctive (quality) feature of *entrepreneurship*. Based on its experiences, NVAO launched the orientation on the clear assessment of the relevance of distinctive features for students and the labour market in 2012.

Research Master's programmes

In 2012, NVAO processed four applications for a research Master's programme (see paragraph 2.5 "Tables"). The Dutch research Master's programmes are among the top programmes in international science, according to the NVAO

report *Peaks in sight - Research Master Review* published in March 2012. The report contains an extensive analysis of the reaccreditation of the research Master's programmes existing in 2011.

Internationalisation

After completion of the pilot project, the definitive assessment framework for the distinctive (quality) feature of internationalisation was established. This feature is now a part of the regular accreditation procedures. In 2012, the feature of internationalisation was awarded for the first time at institutional level. The feature received a European follow-up when the project submitted by NVAO, *Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation* (CeQulnt), was approved by the European Commission. A positive assessment at the European level will, in the future, lead to the European Certificate on Internationalisation (see also Chapter 4, "International Cooperation").

Small-scale and intensive education

Since 2012, Dutch institutions can, under certain conditions, select students for programmes – or for curricula provided within such programmes – with small-scale and intensive education and, in combination, ask for a tuition fee that is higher than the legal tuition fee. Last year, NVAO gave the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science a positive recommendation with respect to eight applications. For profession-oriented or discipline-oriented programmes that are not or only partially geared towards the *Liberal Arts and Sciences* concept and that require a specific interpretation of the standards, separate guidelines have been developed.

Entrepreneurship

At the request of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, NVAO developed a pilot project for the new distinctive (quality) feature "entrepreneurship". The aim is to enable programmes to show that their curriculum gives special attention to and offers students sufficient foundation in entrepreneurship. Following a workshop presentation and an information meeting, the pilot project was carried out in 2012 with 11 Dutch and Flemish institutions, involving professionally oriented and academically oriented Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

2.4 / Other activities

The last round of pilot projects took place for the **Associate Degree programmes**, round 5+, at the beginning of 2012. In this round, new programmes had to be up to standard in

terms of quality and had to reflect the demand in the labour market. Both Dutch universities of applied sciences and Flemish university colleges that offer an Associate Degree programme and universities of applied sciences / university colleges that collaborate with an adult and vocational education institution could submit an application to NVAO. In total, NVAO received 47 applications from 12 institutions. More than 34 applications received positive recommendations, two of which decisions were given "under conditions". NVAO assessed a total of 205 applications for Associate Degree programmes.

Last year NVAO took one positive decision in the context of the **legal entity for higher education** procedure, viz. for the Doctor of Medicine programme at the Saba University School of Medicine in Saba (Caribbean Netherlands). Last year, NVAO did not handle any **appeals** and no **appeals** were lodged with the Netherlands Administrative Jurisdiction Department of the Council of State. Neither were any appeals against NVAO assessments lodged in Flanders in 2012. The procedures for appeals boards in the Netherlands and Flanders have been revised.

NVAO has taken a positive decision on nine requests from four institutions for the **expansion of the programme** (planning-neutral conversion): Fontys Hogescholen Eindhoven (professional orientation Bachelor's programmes for Secondary Education Teacher with grade two qualification in Technical Professional Education and Social Work); HZ University of Applied Sciences (professional orientation Bachelor's programmes for Engineering; HBO-ICT and Social Work); Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (academic orientation Bachelor's programme for European Languages and Cultures) and VU University Amsterdam (academic orientation Bachelor's programmes for Communication and Information Sciences; Literature and Society and Media and Art, Design and Architecture).

In 2012, NVAO accredited the **subject/discipline-specific learning outcomes** of seven professionally oriented Bachelor's programmes, two advanced Bachelor's programmes, six academically oriented Bachelor's programmes and eight Master's programmes. NVAO has awarded these to the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (*Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming* - AKOV) for inclusion in the qualification databank.

2.5 / Tables

The Netherlands and Flanders

Total number of applications

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	The Netherlands lands accr.	TNO Research Master's progr.	Extended Master's progr.	Flanders accr.	TNO	
2012	573	335	55	4	-	166	13
2011	617	305	82	10	-	193	27
2010	719	424	106	55	-	115	19
2009	827	506	117	60	1	132	11
2008	859	573	114	6	4	159	3
2007	770	523	102	5	8	123	9
2006	503	336	91	10	11	42	13
2005	461	371	59	27	1	-	3
2004	345	232	35	78	-	-	-
2003	40	-	5	35	-	-	-
Total	5.714	3.605	766	290	25	930	98

TNO = initial accreditation

Total number of applications withdrawn

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	Accr.	TNO	Research Master's programme	Extended Master's programme
2012	13	3	10	-	-
2011	30	9	20	1	-
2010	61	12	42	7	-
2009	47	9	36	2	-
2008	28	2	24	-	2
2007	27	5	22	-	-
2006	48	8	31	3	6
2005	39	14	15	10	-
2004	37	2	35	-	-
2003	2	-	2	-	-

The Netherlands

Total number of applications

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	Extensive programme assessment	Limited programme assessment	Old accr. system	Conversion of joint degree
Accr.	335	55	111	168	1
TNO	55	19	22	14	-

Total number of applications

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	Posi- tive	Nega- tive	With- drawn	Improved	Cond.	Other	Has met cond.
Accr.	335	318	1	3	12	-	1	-
TNO	55	29	1	10	-	15	-	(13)

Total number of institutional quality assurance audits

Processed as of 31 December

	Total
2012	5
2011	2

* This concerns recommendations and no decisions under Dutch law

Total number of improvement periods/under conditions

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	Improvement period (accr)	Positive under cond. (TNO)	Positive under cond. (institutional audit)
2012	29	12	15	2
2011	9	9	-	-

Total number of research Master's programmes

Processed as of 31 December

	Positive	Negative	Improvement
Research Master's	4	3	1
Extended Master's	-	-	-

Total number of applications in Antilles*

Processed as of 31 December

	Total
2012	16

* This concerns recommendations and no decisions under Dutch law

Flanders

Total number of applications

Processed as of 31 December

	Total	Positive	Negative	Withdrawn
Accr.	166	157	9	-
TNO	13	10	-	3

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Chapter 3

Cooperation with the 'Profession'

‘The longer – and therefore more sustained – a graduate can function well in society, the higher the quality of the programme. For NVAO, quality and sustainability go hand in hand.’

Ann Demeulemeester, NVAO vice chairperson

NVAO strives to maintain good relationships and open communication in society and with its stakeholders, such as the Dutch and Flemish governments, higher education institutions and programmes, umbrella organisations and student organisations, quality assessment agencies, employers and employee organisations, secretaries and chairpersons of panels. In addition to the transfer of knowledge and the mutual exchange of experiences via meetings and conferences, the primary focus since 2012 has been making more explicit the balance between the independent, clear and critical (*‘fair’*) assessment and the promotion of continual quality improvement.

With the Dutch quality assessment agencies and the Flemish quality assessment agencies – the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad – VLIR*), the Council of Flemish University Colleges (*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad – VLHORA*) and the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (*Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad – VLUHR*), the merger organisation of the quality assurance cells of the VLIR and the VLHORA – NVAO periodically discusses the implementation of the assessment procedures. NVAO participates in the Steering Committee on learning outcomes of the VLUHR as an observer.

In Flanders, the VLUHR is responsible, in consultation with NVAO, for training the Flemish panel members, (external) secretaries and process coordinators. In the spring of 2012, the first intervision on this took place. In the Netherlands, NVAO trains and certifies the external secretaries/process coordinators (currently 193 in total). Also, up to now 43 (vice) chairpersons have been trained, on invitation, for the audit panels in the context of the institutional quality assurance audits. People from outside higher education are also invited for this in order to avoid the potential dangers of “organisational blindness”. NVAO publishes these names on its website. NVAO organised two intervision meetings for the certified secretaries in 2012.

NVAO maintains contacts with students at different levels. Periodic consultation is held with the Dutch National Students Association (*Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg – ISO*), the Dutch National Union of Students (*Landelijke Studenten Vakbond – LSVb*) and the National Union of Students in Flanders (*Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten – VVS*). The student organisations are also represented on the Advisory Council of NVAO. Annual training and “reunion days” are held for the student panel members. NVAO publishes its decisions on programmes on its website for the benefit of students.

NVAO wants to increase the accessibility of this quality information. This is important in both the Netherlands and Flanders in view of the growing demand for achieving a distinction between institutions and programmes.

NVAO regularly consults with both governments and with the Netherlands Education Inspectorate. The Inspectorate and NVAO want to complement one another in their work. This means that the Inspectorate fulfils a supervisory role, primarily from the perspective of legislation and regulations, and funding. NVAO assesses the quality of the programmes and, for the institutions that have registered for the institutional audit, the degree to which they are in control of their educational activities. For NVAO, the guiding principle is earned trust. This starting point also serves as the basis for the cooperative agreement that NVAO and the Inspectorate concluded in 2012. At the end of 2013, both parties will assess whether the protocol needs to be revised.

NVAO and the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV) will hold consultations on the rollout of the Flemish qualification structure. NVAO provides the recognised qualifications that contain subject/discipline-specific learning outcomes to AKOV so that they can be placed in the qualification databank.

In the Advisory Council of NVAO, all stakeholders are represented. The advisory council advises NVAO periodically concerning its policy and activities.

Chapter 4

International Cooperation

‘The Netherlands and Flanders recognise one another’s degrees and diplomas in both Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes in profession-oriented and academic-oriented education and in art education. It is a first in Europe.’

Lucien Bollaert, member of NVAO Executive Board

Cooperation between the Netherlands and Flanders

In December 2012/January 2013, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium signed the protocol for revising the Treaty of 2003. This provides guarantees regarding the Dutch institutional quality assurance audit and the Flemish institutional review in the new accreditation systems. At the same time, the Dutch and Flemish Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes in both profession-oriented and academic-oriented education and in art education are rendered equal to one another. The mutual recognition of one another’s degrees and diplomas between the Netherlands and Flanders is a first in Europe.

Cooperation in Europe

At the European level, the extra value of the international activities of NVAO for Dutch and Flemish higher education is a key point of focus. In its strategic policy, NVAO has determined that the international perspective is one of its priorities. Among other things, this means that NVAO seeks active cooperation with reliable, leading international partners, develops instruments to increase this international cooperation and promotes the mutual recognition of diplomas at the international level. In addition, through international cooperation, NVAO aims to find the best possible forms of external quality assessment.

International networks

NVAO participates in three international networks of quality assurance organisations in higher education. NVAO is a member of the board of the *International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (INQAAHE), the *European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education* (ECA) and the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education* (EQAR). Up to and including October 2012, NVAO was a part of the board of the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA). NVAO also sits on the quality assurance commission of the National Coordination Point NLQF of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (for Flanders, NVAO ranks the subject/discipline-specific learning outcomes of all Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes at the Flemish and European qualification levels).

For the Netherlands, NVAO also participates in the *Structural Reforms Working Group*, which reports to the Bologna Follow-

Up Group set up by the European ministers on the implementation of measures announced in the Bucharest Communiqué in the areas of quality assurance, recognition and qualification frameworks, among others.

The membership in these networks also contributes to building up relationships with experts that can participate in different assessments.

International projects

In the year under review, NVAO focused on different international projects. One of the successful international projects carried out under the coordination of NVAO with a subsidy from the European Commission is the ECA project *European Training of QA Experts* (E-TRAIN) (completed in 2012), in which a European training programme for experts and policy employees was set up and a databank was developed with experts from different countries. Another project, also coordinated by NVAO, is the ECA project *Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded* (JOQAR), in which both the accreditation and the recognition of diplomas of joint programmes is facilitated (to be completed in 2013).

Distinctive (quality) feature of internationalisation

After completion of the pilot project for the distinctive (quality) feature of internationalisation and the establishment of the definitive assessment framework, the first distinctive feature of internationalisation could be awarded at the institutional level in 2012 after a positive institutional quality assurance audit. As an addition to the feature, NVAO introduced the *Good Practices in Internationalisation Platform* (GPIP) in 2012 in which Dutch and Flemish higher education programmes can share experiences in the area of internationalisation. The good practices pertain to (one of) the five standards of the distinctive (quality) feature of internationalisation: vision, learning outcomes, teaching & learning, staff and students. NVAO also participates in the steering committee of Nuffic and Flamenco that promotes good practices in internationalisation by organising biannual workshops for Dutch and Flemish institutions.

The feature received a European follow-up in 2012 when the project *Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation* (CeQuInt), submitted by NVAO, was approved by the executive agency of the European Commission. *CeQuInt* aims to assess the internationalisation at the European level and to award it with a European Certificate of Internationalisation. The project is being carried out by a consortium of fourteen partners from Germany (2), Finland, France (2), Croatia, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Spain (2), the Academic Cooperation

Association (ACA) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). NVAO is coordinating the project.

ARQATA

Up to May 2014, NVAO will be carrying out the project ARQATA (Armenia Quality Assurance Technical Assistance) in Armenia. It is funded by the World Bank. NVAO is providing Armenian universities with technical support in the development of their quality assurance system. NVAO is also supporting the *National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance* (ANQA, the Armenian quality assurance organisation) with the further professionalisation of the organisation and with preparations for their international external review on the basis of the ENQA principles.

In 2012, in addition to two congresses, various training sessions and workshops were held with ANQA and eight universities. NVAO also organised two study visits for Armenian delegations to the Netherlands and Flanders (September 2012) and Switzerland (October 2012). In June 2013, under the management of NVAO chairpersons, two institutional audits and three programme assessments will be organised; in September 2013, ANQA will be subjected to a proof audit.

For the ARQATA project, NVAO is collaborating with experts from the Netherlands and abroad: Hanzehogeschool Groningen, Delft University of Technology, Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, University of Leiden, University of Maastricht, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, ECA, ENQA and quality assurance organisations from England (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education - QAA) and Switzerland (Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung - OAQ).

Other activities

- › At the request of the Surinamese accreditation organisation NOVA (in formation), NVAO assessed a programme provided by the Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo.
- › NVAO organised the seminar *Good Practices in Internationalisation* for the representatives of higher education institutions, umbrella organisations and student organisations who are specialised in internationalisation. At this seminar the *Good Practices in Internationalisation Platform* was also introduced.
- › In the context of the E-TRAIN-project, NVAO gave a presentation during a conference on training panel members in Madrid.
- › As the organiser/committee member, NVAO was involved in the external ENQA reviews of the Spanish accreditation organisation Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA) and the Swedish QAgency.
- › NVAO participates in the European ENQA research project in order to come up with recommendations for involving the stakeholders in higher education in quality assurance with the aim of creating more external impulses and responsiveness in quality assessment.
- › NVAO is working with Flamenco/Flanders Knowledge Area vzw and Nuffic in a series of workshops on good practices in internationalisation. These workshops are held alternately in Flanders and in the Netherlands.

Chapter 5

NVAO

Organisation

In 2012 various changes were made at the management level of NVAO. The strategic policy was also revised.

These changes, in addition to the regular tasks and extra tasks, the preparations for the external review and the restructuring of operations as a result of the new Dutch and Flemish accreditation systems, led in the year under review to considerable pressure being placed on the organisation, both on the staff and financially.

The regular budget of NVAO has, of course, increased negligibly in these economic times. This means that room to manoeuvre is being sought in the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation and within the organisation. In the year under review, attention has been given to the development of an internal quality-oriented culture through slimmed-down, but efficient internal quality assurance. In the years to come, new tasks and (international) projects must fit in with the strategic policy of NVAO and contribute to the quality-oriented culture within and the visibility of Dutch and Flemish higher education.

Executive Board and Advisory Council of NVAO

On 1 July 2012, Vice Chairman em. Prof. Dr G. Langouche left on reaching the end of his term of appointment. On the occasion of his departure in July, NVAO organised the symposium "The importance of research for education" at KU Leuven.

Chairman Dr K.L.L.M. Dittrich left on 1 December 2012 for the Association of Universities (VSNU), where he was appointed as Chairman and successor of Dr S. Noorda. In November, NVAO organised a farewell reception for him in The Hague.

In 2012, NVAO also said good-bye to Ms Prof. Dr P.L. (Pauline) Meurs, Ms I. (Iris) van Riet and Messrs mr. E. (Eric) Derycke and lic. G.E.D. (Gilbert) Vanleenhove as members of the Board and to Ms H.A.M.F. (Heleen) Keijzer-Lambooy and Messrs T. (Toon) Martens, R. (Rudy) Van Renterghem, T. (Ton) Van den Brande and P. (Paul) Verboven as members of the NVAO Advisory Council.

On 1 November 2012, the Committee of Ministers appointed Messrs mr. drs. B.J. (Bruno) Bruins and drs. J.A.C.F. (Jasper) Tuytel as members of the Board of NVAO.

NVAO Board

The Board of NVAO consists of a maximum of 15 members. The Chair and a maximum of four other members make up the Executive Board. Board members are appointed for a term of four years by the Committee of Ministers (the Dutch and Flemish Ministers responsible for higher education). The board members have expertise in the field of higher education, the professional practice of higher education, scientific research or the area of quality assurance. The Board decides on the policy, the management regulations, the budget, the annual report and the annual accounts and the decisions that are open to external appeal. In addition, the Board provides guidelines for the structure of the organisation, information provision and the financial-economic running of the organisation. The Executive Board directs the organisation on a daily basis and is accountable to the Board for its actions.

NVAO Advisory Council

The Board appoints an Advisory Council that provides unsolicited or requested recommendations on general policy. The members of the Advisory Council are appointed for a maximum term of three years and come from the circles of: the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad), the Dutch Training and Education Council (NRTO), the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), the Council of Flemish University Colleges (VLHORA) – now combined into VLUHR, the Dutch National Students Association (ISO), the Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb), the Flemish Union of Students (VVS) and the Flanders Social and Economic Council (SERV).

Composition of NVAO Board

(in alphabetical order, 31 December 2012)

Lucien Bollaert (member of Executive Board)
Bruno Bruins
Eric Derycke
Koen Geven
Claire Tillekaerts
Iris van Riet
Paul van Roon
Jasper Tuytel
Gilbert Vanleenhove
Paul Zevenbergen (member of Executive Board)

Composition of NVAO Executive Board

(in alphabetical order, 31 December 2012)

Lucien Bollaert
Paul Zevenbergen

Composition of NVAO Advisory Council

(in alphabetical order, 31 December 2012)

Remie Bolte
Dirk Broos
Gertjan Dewaele
Henk de Greef
Ton van Haaften
Toon Martens
Harry Martens
Tessa Timmermans
Rudy Van Renterghem
Paul Verboven

(deputy members)

Hugo Deckers
Paul Geerlings
Nele Muys
Luc Van de Velde

Changes in 2013

In December 2012, the Committee of Ministers appointed Ms lic. A.M.J. (Ann) Demeulemeester as a member of the Executive Board of NVAO effective 1 January 2013.

The Committee of Ministers appointed Ms lic. M. (Mia) De Schamphelaere, Ms Dr B.E. (Lieteke) van Vucht Tijssen and Messrs em. Prof. R. (Ruddy) Doom and lic. B. (Bart) Maes as members of the Board of NVAO effective 1 February 2013. Ms lic. C. (Claire) Tillekaerts was appointed for another four years as a member of the Board.

On 6 February 2013, the Committee of Ministers appointed Ms Demeulemeester as Vice Chair and Dr A.H. (Anne) Flierman as Chair of NVAO. Mr Flierman took office on 1 May 2013.

Internal Quality Assurance

The internal quality assurance system of NVAO is based on the *European Foundation for Quality Management* (EFQM) and operates on a cycle of two years. At the end of 2012, a quality report was drafted – below is a summary of this report.

The 2010-2012 period saw a number of developments and activities that were significant for the internal quality assurance of NVAO. Work was done on the objectives in the areas of “Leadership, strategy and policy” and the primary and secondary tasks that underlie them. Parallel to this, internal discussion days were organised that focused on the policy strategy, the quality-oriented culture and the identification of bottlenecks and opportunities. A start was also made on the improvement of the decisions and advisory reports. The internal handbooks now focus on the substantive support of the person in charge.

The layout of decisions and the administrative information in the decision have been simplified and the summary of the advisory report has been included in the decision. The quality of the accreditation reports has improved due to the new requirements for reporting and the training of secretaries. The templates have also been improved and last year the advisory reports for the institutional quality assurance audit were reviewed. The improvement of the quality of the advisory reports for new programmes will continue to be a point of attention.

In 2012, a self-evaluation report was developed for the external review of NVAO by the international audit committee of ENQA, see also Chapter 1. The self-evaluation report presents the strengths of NVAO: NVAO is a respected organisation, is flexible and proactive and distinctly collaborative. The report also named the points needing attention: the administrative load of the accreditation system should be limited; the consistency of the assessment and decision-making requires attention, as do the deadlines, and in the area of the system-wide analysis, improvements can be made. Finally, as a binational organisation, NVAO can optimise its significance for the intended strong cooperation in higher education between the Netherlands and Flanders.

Organisation

Communication

The visibility of NVAO in Dutch and Flemish higher education has increased due to the socially experienced need for quality improvement in Dutch higher education and internal initiatives, such as various news reports, information rounds, conferences and meetings in the Netherlands and Flanders, the provision of personal information and (online) feedback rounds. From the side of NVAO last year, the primary focus was news reports on the completed decision-making, the changes to the board, the development of the new Flemish accreditation system, the progress of various (international) projects, the new cooperation protocol with the Dutch Inspectorate of Education and the external review of NVAO.

In 2012, communication surrounding international activities improved. Various policy employees were intensively involved in international projects and regular reports were made on current business via intranet. The English-language information provided on the NVAO website has been updated. The annual seminars on internationalisation were attended well by Dutch and Flemish representatives of higher education institutions and umbrella organisations. Board members and international policy employees actively attended a number of foreign forums last year.

NVAO publishes its decisions and the accompanying assessment reports, and/or panel reports on the programmes it has assessed in the databank on the website www.nvao.com. The NVAO databank exchanges data from accredited programmes with the databanks of the Flemish Higher Education Register (www.hogeronderwijs.be) and the European Crossroads (www.crossroads.eu).

Computerisation

In 2012, NVAO replaced the internal IT system after ten years of service. The new system is geared towards operations, which increases the efficiency with which applications are processed. The modernisation of other IT structures was also begun, including a databank and the data management of panel members and relations. The databank should also be able to serve as the basis for accessible external communications tailored to different target groups and accreditation data. In the year under review, the servers were renewed as

well and the hardware was replaced after five years of service. Finally, the IT team was reorganised and (temporarily) expanded and, in addition to an IT steering committee, a users group was set up.

Staff

As a result of the findings of the first employee satisfaction study, the employment conditions were improved in 2012 on the basis of a risk inventory and evaluation (RI&E). An integrity policy was also developed. In the assessment system, the function and competency profiles of staff and support staff were reformulated to improve the quality of assessments. In order to improve the quality of the performance and assessment process, in 2012 the function and competency profiles for the staff and support positions were reformulated subsequent to those of the policy employees.

In 2012, two policy employees (Dutch/Flemish) were recruited. Job vacancies were also filled for the head of the finances department, the department of Internationalisation and the development of system-wide analyses. Last year, NVAO called in two external advisors in the areas of computerisation and organisation/communication and made use of a small group of regular temp/standby employees for operations, catering/logistics and IT.

Hoofdstuk 6

Appendix

List of definitions and abbreviations

AKOV	Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming (<i>Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training</i>)
ANQA	<i>National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance</i>
ARQATA	Armenia Quality Assurance Technical Assistance
CeQuInt	Certificate for the Quality of Internationalisation
CDHO	Commissie Doelmatigheid Hoger Onderwijs (<i>Committee for Effective Higher Education</i>)
CROHO	Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs (<i>Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes</i>)
DUO	Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (Education Executive Agency)
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education
ECTS	European Creditpoint Transfer System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
ENIC	European National Information Centre
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
EUA	European University Association
Dutch quality assessment agency	Independent agency conducting external assessments
Flemish quality assessment agency	VLIR, VLHORA
GPIP	Good Practices in Internationalisation Platform
HOR	Hogeronderwijsregister (<i>Higher Education Register</i>)
Inspectorate	Education Inspectorate
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISO	Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (<i>Dutch National Students Association</i>)
JOQAR	Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded
KNAW	Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (<i>Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences</i>)
LSVb	Landelijke Studenten Vakbond (<i>Dutch National Union of Students</i>)
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NRTO	Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding (<i>Dutch Training and Education Council</i>)
NUFFIC	Nederlandse organisatie voor internationale samenwerking in het hoger onderwijs (<i>Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education</i>)
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (<i>Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders</i>)
RI&E	Risico-inventarisatie en –evaluatie (<i>Risk Inventory & Evaluation</i>)
SERV	Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (<i>Flanders Social and Economic Council</i>)
VH	Vereniging Hogescholen (<i>The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences</i>)
VLHORA	Vlaamse Hogescholenraad (<i>Council of Flemish University Colleges</i>)
VLIR	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (<i>Flemish Interuniversity Council</i>)
VLOR	Vlaamse Onderwijsraad (<i>Flemish Education Council</i>)
VLUHR	Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (<i>Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges</i>)
VSK	Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel (<i>Flemish Pupils Association</i>)
VSNU	Vereniging van Universiteiten (<i>Association of Universities in the Netherlands</i>)
VVS	Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten (<i>National Union of Students in Flanders</i>)
WHW	Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (<i>Dutch Higher Education and Research Act</i>)

Colophon

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NVAO
Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO)
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)
Parkstraat 28 / 2514 JK Den Haag
P.O. Box 85498 / 2508 CD The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 70 312 2300
F +31 70 312 2301
info@nvaio.net
www.nvaio.net

NVAO

Nederlands- Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands
and Flanders (NVAO)

Parkstraat 28 / 2514 JK Den Haag
P.O. Box 85498 / 2508 CD The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 312 23 00

F +31 (0)70 312 23 01

E info@nvaio.net

www.nvaio.net