

Substantive Change Report
by Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)

Register Committee

Ref. RC/C05

Ver. 1.0

Date 2016-03-09

Page 1 / 2

Decision of:	9 March 2016
Report received on:	03/12/2015
Agency registered since:	14/05/2011
Last external review report:	December 2010
Registered until:	31/12/2016
Absented themselves from decision-making:	n/a
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantive Change Report 2. Clarification request of 15/12/2015 3. Clarification by QANU of 6/1/2016

The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 3 December 2015.

The Register Committee sought and received clarification from QANU on some matters, referred to below (attached: request of 15/12/2015 and response of 6/1/2016).

The Register Committee took note of the changes in the Dutch accreditation system, introduced by changes in the legal frameworks and subsequent decisions of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), which have changed QANU's status in the Dutch accreditation system and led to changes in its methodology and working methods.

The Register Committee welcomed QANU's explanation how ESG Part 1 is reflected in NVAO's criteria for programme assessments, which are used by QANU. The Committee underlined that the next external review of QANU should address in detail how ESG standards 1.1 – 1.10 are covered in the assessment frameworks, while giving attention also to adjustments that might have been made based on the ESG 2015.

The Register Committee noted that QANU's reports are published through NVAO and not by QANU directly. The Committee underlined that QANU, nevertheless, remains fully responsible for ensuring compliance with ESG standard 2.6. The next external review of QANU should thus address whether

QANU has a process in place that ensures that all its review reports are published and easily accessible, whether the result is positive or negative.

The Register Committee noted QANU's statement that it did not produce any thematic analyses so far. The Committee, however, recognised that QANU's "state of the art" reports might qualify as thematic analysis in the understanding of the ESG.

The Committee underlined that thematic analyses (of the assessments QANU carried out, according to standard 3.4) remain QANU's own responsibility, irrespective of analyses or reports published by NVAO. The next external review of QANU should give attention to this matter.

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Page 2 / 2

Subject: Substantive Change Report: QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities)**From:** "loojenga@qanu.nl" <form_engine@fs22.formsite.com>**Date:** 03/12/2015 09:11**To:** substantive-changes@eqar.eu

Reference #	8835394
Status	Complete
Login Username	
Login Email	
Agency #1 *	QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities)
Expiry date #1 *	11/05/2011
Contact #1 *	Sietze Looijenga
Phone #1 *	+31302303100
Email #1 *	loojenga@qanu.nl
Other organisations? *	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed? *	Yes
Description *	As a result of an amendment of the legislation regarding higher education, QANU's status has changed. The effect of the amendment is that institutions of higher education are no longer obliged to engage an external quality assurance agency for the assessments of their degree programmes. Instead, the assessment framework requires secretaries of assessment committees to be certified by the NVAO, the Accreditation Organization for the Netherlands and Flanders. In practice, this amendment has not had any effects on QANU's activities. We still assess a vast majority of the degree programmes of Dutch universities. Of course, QANU's staff members are all certified by the NVAO.
B. Has the organisational structure changed? *	No
C.i. Are there new types of activities? *	No
C.ii. Are there changes in existing activities? *	Yes
C.iii. Have some or all existing activities been discontinued? *	No
Description new/changed *	QANU has adopted a revised methodology for its assessments of degree programmes, in accordance with the amendment of the legislation for higher education referred to above. The revisions are primarily related to the set of standards used for assessing programmes.
Last Update	2015-12-03 02:11:04

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Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)
Sietze Looijenga

– by email –

Brussels, 15 December 2015

Substantive Change Report – Clarification Request

Dear Sietze,

We wish to thank you for the Substantive Change Report of 3 December 2015. Your report is currently being reviewed by two rapporteurs before it is brought to the attention of the entire EQAR Register Committee.

In your report, you explained that QANU adopted a revised methodology for its assessments of degree programmes. In order to prepare consideration by the Committee, we would be obliged if you could:

1. elaborate on the changes related to the set of standards used for assessing programmes, especially with a view to how ESG 1.1 – 1.10 are reflected in those standards;
2. clarify whether any changes have been introduced in the following areas, as listed in the substantive change reporting form:
 - a. review team composition, selection, appointment and training of reviewers (ESG 2.4)
 - b. site visits (ESG 2.3)
 - c. publication of reports (ESG 2.6)
 - d. follow-up (ESG 2.3)
 - e. appeals system (ESG 2.7)
 - f. embedding in thematic analyses and internal quality assurance of the agency (ESG 3.4 & 3.6)

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EQAR Founding Members:



In order to expedite proceedings we kindly ask you for a reply by **6 January 2016**. Please inform us if any difficulties arise in meeting this deadline.

I shall be at your disposal if you have any further questions or inquiries.

Kind regards,



Colin Tück
(Director)

Elaboration and clarification on recent changes in the Dutch system of external quality assurance in higher education and their consequences for QANU as a quality assurance agency operating in the Dutch context

– prepared for EQAR (the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) by Sietze Looijenga, director of QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities) –

The system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands can be characterized as a two-tier system. In the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, accreditation is defined as a quality mark expressing 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 officially recognized degrees. The NVAO (the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization) is established by the same Act as the organization that has the legal power to award accreditation to programmes which fulfil the conditions for accreditation laid down in the Act. The NVAO does not conduct the assessments that constitute the basis for the decisions on the re-accreditation of existing degree programmes. These assessments are carried out by quality assurance agencies such as QANU. QANU almost exclusively assesses degree programmes offered by universities. The other agencies operating in the Netherlands mainly work for institutions of higher professional education (in Dutch: *hogescholen*). The assessment reports produced by QANU and the other quality assurance agencies serve as the basis for the NVAO's decisions on re-accrediting degree programmes. The NVAO developed assessment frameworks as an implementation and elaboration of the Act that serve as the starting point for the assessments of existing degree programmes conducted by QANU.

Since QANU's assessment by an ENQA review team in October 2010, the NVAO's assessment frameworks were revised twice, following amendments of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research. The most important revision is the introduction of the institutional quality assurance assessment. Since 1 January 2011, institutions of higher education can apply for such an institutional assessment. If an institution passes this assessment, its degree programmes are assessed on the basis of a framework for limited programme assessments. If an institution fails the institutional assessment, or if it does not apply for such an assessment, its degree programmes are assessed on the basis of a framework for extensive programme assessments.

The main reasons for the introduction of the institutional quality assurance assessment were that the amount of work involved in a programme assessment (the 'administrative burden') was generally considered to be too high and that the assessments themselves were generally felt to focus too strongly on procedures and processes instead of the contents of a programme. The philosophy underlying the revision was that those aspects of a programme that are not programme-specific (e.g., the system of quality assurance or the human resource policy, both of which are usually defined at the level of a faculty or a university as a whole) should be dealt with in an institutional quality assurance assessment. If these aspects are assessed positively, it is assumed that this assessment is valid for all programmes offered by the institution. These aspects are therefore not taken into consideration in the assessments of specific programmes. As a result, these assessments can focus more strongly on the contents of a programme. In addition, it was assumed that the amount of work involved in a programme assessment would be reduced considerably because the aspects mentioned would not be assessed any longer.

After a new revision of the frameworks for programme assessments that became effective on 1 January 2015, the assessment framework for limited programme assessments (used for the vast majority of the assessments conducted by QANU) currently has four standards. These are:

Standards for a limited programme assessment

(from the NVAO's Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system in the Netherlands, 19 December 2014)

Intended learning outcomes

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

Teaching-learning environment

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

Assessment

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

Achieved learning outcomes

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

The framework for extensive programme assessments currently has 11 standards:

Standards for an extensive programme assessment

(from the NVAO's Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system in the Netherlands, 19 December 2014)

Intended learning outcomes

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

Curriculum

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

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

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

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

Staff

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

Services and facilities

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

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

Quality assurance

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

Assessment

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

Learning outcomes achieved

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

Finally, the framework used for institutional quality assurance assessments has five standards:

Standards for an institutional quality assurance assessment

(from the NVAO's Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system in the Netherlands, 19 December 2014)

Vision of the quality of the education provided

Standard 1: The institution has a broadly supported vision of the quality of its education and the development of a quality culture.

Policy

Standard 2: The institution pursues an adequate policy in order to realise its vision of the quality of its education. This comprises at least: policies in the field of education, staff, facilities, accessibility and feasibility for students with a functional disability, embedding of research in the education provided, as well as the interrelation between education and the (international) professional field and discipline.

Output

Standard 3: The institution has insight into the extent to which its vision of the quality of its education is realised. It gauges and evaluates the quality of its programmes on a regular basis, among students, staff, alumni and representatives of the professional field.

Improvement policy

Standard 4: The institution can demonstrate that it systematically improves the quality of its programmes wherever required.

Organisation and decision-making structure

Standard 5: The institution has an effective organisation and decision-making structure with regard to the quality of its programmes, which clearly defines the tasks, authorities and responsibilities and which encompasses the participation of students and staff.

Compared to the framework for extensive assessments, the framework for limited assessments does not take (internal) quality assurance into consideration. In addition, it is more concise and integrated, especially with respect to the assessment of the teaching-learning environment.

Other changes in the assessment frameworks relate to the procedure for composing an assessment committee (formally, an institution convenes a committee, appoints a secretary and presents the names of the committee members and the secretary to the NVAO for approval), the materials to be presented to the assessment committee by a programme (the amount of obligatory materials has been reduced), and the assessment scales (committees give a final assessment of a programme on a four-point scale instead of a two-point scale). A major recent revision is the introduction of assessment groups, groups (or clusters) of degree programmes in

the same scientific discipline (e.g., Mathematics or Political Science) that are obligatorily assessed as a group by the same assessment committee. Essentially, the effects of this revision are limited to programmes offered by the institutions of higher professional education: the programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands are traditionally assessed in groups or clusters, covering a scientific field of a discipline as a whole.

According to the current Act on higher education, the NVAO conducts the institutional quality assurance assessments. The Act does not provide any rules or regulations relating to conducting programme assessments. This means that institutions of higher education are free to choose how they organize the assessments of the degree programmes they offer and that they are not required to engage a quality assurance agency such as QANU for these assessments. In practice, all institutions of higher education engage QANU or one of the other agencies active in the Netherlands to carry out the assessments of their degree programmes. In 2011, the NVAO introduced the requirement that secretaries of assessment committees are certified. QANU's project co-ordinators all followed a two-day training organised by the NVAO and received a certificate afterwards.

Elaboration on the changes in the sets of standards from the perspective of ESG 1.1 – 1.10.

It is difficult to elaborate on the effects of the changes in the sets of standards from the perspective of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines, partly because the ESG were revised after the main changes (in particular the introduction of the institutional assessment and the limited programme assessments) were implemented and partly because there is no one-to-one relationship between the standards in the Dutch frameworks and the ESG. In what follows, I will briefly consider the standards and guidelines under Part 1 of the ESG and describe whether and how they can be related to the standards from the current assessment frameworks.

Generally speaking, the standards and guidelines under Part 1 (dealing with internal quality assurance) seem to be well in line with the main principle underlying the system of quality assurance in the Netherlands: institutions of higher education are responsible for the quality of the programmes they offer. The introduction of the institutional assessment seems to have strengthened the relation between the ESG and the systems of internal quality assurance used by the institutions of higher education. At the same time, the Dutch system of external quality assurance still has as its starting point that accreditation takes place at the level of degree programmes. It thus ensures that relevant stakeholders can take it for granted that the quality of individual degree programmes has been assessed positively by external experts and that the value of the degrees awarded to students is therefore guaranteed.

Various standards under Part 1 of the ESG can be directly related to themes or issues dealt with in the institutional assessment. The first two standards of the framework for institutional assessment, for instance, relate directly to ESG 1.1 (*Policy for quality assurance*) and ESG 1.2 (*Design and approval of programmes*). ESG 1.1 does not receive explicit attention in a programme assessment. ESG 1.2 may be discussed in a more practical sense, for example when a programme has recently revised its curriculum.

The formal frameworks do not require explicitly that learning, teaching and assessment are student-centred (cf. ESG 1.3, *Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment*). This is true both for the frameworks that were used before 2011 and the revised frameworks since then. At the same time, the standards of the assessment frameworks show clearly that institutions are expected to position students in the centre of their activities. Standard 2 of the framework for limited programme assessments, for instance, refers explicitly to “enabl[ing] the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes”. Various standards within the framework for extensive assessments also show that institutions are expected to provide student-centred

learning, teaching and assessment. In essence, the frameworks used before 2011 followed the same approach. As a result, the changes in the set of standards did not really have an effect here.

From the perspective of ESG 1.4 (*Student admission, progression, recognition and certification*), it is important to note that every programme is legally required to have an education and exam regulation (in Dutch: *Onderwijs- en Examenregeling*). This document contains pre-defined regulations and procedures, such as admission criteria, admission procedures, regulations and procedures for progression, for providing information to students about their progress, information about the conditions for graduation et cetera. This education and exam regulation is one of the documents that an assessment committee receives prior to its site visit. During the site visit, the committee discusses issues related to admission, progress and graduation with students, teachers, the exam committee and the programme management. These issues fall under Standard 2 and 3 of the framework for limited assessment and under Standards 4, 5 and 10 of the framework for extensive assessments. The framework used before 2011 had separate standards for student admission and for success rates. It thus seems that the themes under ESG 1.4 receive less attention in the revised frameworks. Of course, this does not mean that they are not dealt with at all.

When it comes to the competences of the teaching staff (ESG 1.5, *Teaching staff*), it is relevant that all universities in the Netherlands have adopted the so-called basic education qualification (in Dutch: *basiskwalificatie onderwijs*), a description of the competences and attitudes every university teacher should have. Obtaining this qualification is a necessary condition for a permanent position as a teacher. Some universities have also introduced a senior qualification describing more advanced competences and attitudes. In some universities, this senior qualification is required for a position as programme director or other senior positions. The competences of the teachers are discussed in the annual assessment interviews between teachers and their superiors (mostly professors who head a department, section or research group). Staff competences are dealt with under Standard 2 of the framework for limited assessment and under Standard 6 of the framework for extensive assessments. The framework used before 2011 had separate standards for quantity and (didactic and scientific or professional) quality of staff. These aspects are now approached in a more integrated manner. As a result, the changes in the set of standards did not really have an effect on the way the competences of staff members are assessed.

The Dutch system of higher education has no formal requirements related to learning resources and student support and it is not easy to define 'appropriate funding' (cf. ESG 1.6, *Learning resources and student support*), but it is common practice that institutions ask students in course or programme evaluations whether they consider the resources and support available to them as adequate and accessible. It is also common practice that assessment committees verify whether students encounter any problems related to learning resources or support. Assessment committees using the framework for limited assessments take the availability of learning resources and student support into consideration in their assessment of Standard 2. In the framework for extensive assessments, learning resources fall under Standard 3 or 7, while student support falls under Standard 8. The framework used before 2011 had separate standards comparable of Standards 7 and 8 of the current framework for extensive assessments and a standard that was similar to Standard 3 of that framework. The changes in the frameworks have not had any effect on the attention for these themes in assessments of degree programmes.

All universities have experts who specialize in information management (and conduct institutional research, as it is commonly called in the Netherlands). These experts collect, process and use information from a variety of sources, for instance systems used for monitoring student progress and success rates, from evaluations of courses and programmes, from surveys among graduates, employers or other stakeholders et cetera (cf. ESG 1.7, *Information management*). Students and teachers are involved in these processes in various ways: they

provide information (for example by completing evaluation forms or surveys), they analyse information (for instance, the outcomes of evaluations are discussed in the meetings of the programme committee) and they use information (for instance, the programme committee may use the outcomes of evaluations to provide advice or to formulate proposals or measures for the programme management). The results of the work in the area of information management largely serve as means to measure whether goals have been reached or whether improvement is necessary. Information management as such has never been assessed in the Netherlands, so the changes in the frameworks have not had any effects here. Of course, information management is very important when it comes to providing evidence supporting claims that a programme meets the standards, and the changes in the frameworks have had effects on the kind of information presented to committees or the relative importance of information. For instance, until 2011, the success rates of programmes were explicitly assessed in a programme assessment, whereas the success rates are considered to be evidence that a programme manages to realize its goals or aims since 2011.

It is of crucial importance to institutions of higher education that they provide information to students, prospective students and other stakeholders that is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible (cf. 1.8, *Public information*). Institutions primarily use their websites for distributing information, but they have other means as well (printed materials, brochures or leaflets et cetera). The legal and formal frameworks relevant for institutions of higher education do not contain any explicit requirements for the provision of public information, but institutions consider it a necessary condition for their reputation and position to provide such information. The availability or quality of public information as such has never been assessed in the Netherlands, so the changes in the frameworks have not had any effects here.

Institutions in the Netherlands are expected to have a system of internal quality assurance. It is reasonable to assume that such a system will monitor and review the quality and effectiveness of the degree programmes offered by an institution (cf. ESG 1.9, *On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes*). Committees that assess degree programmes on the basis of the framework for limited assessments do not assess the system as such, but they do discuss issues related to (outcomes of) evaluations of the contents of the curriculum, the changing needs of society, students' workload or the procedures for assessment from a substantial point of view. During its site visit, an assessment committee always talks to the programme committee, the committee that receives course and programme evaluations and advises the programme management on the basis of the outcomes of these evaluations. The effect of the changes in the sets of standards is that the *system* of internal quality assurance is no longer dealt with in a programme assessment if the institution offering the programme has successfully passed the institutional assessment. Of course, this does not imply that the programmes of this institution are not monitored continually or reviewed on a regular basis. If the institution has successfully passed the institutional assessment, it is fair to assume that the institution's internal quality assurance ensures that the institution's degree programmes are monitored and reviewed systematically. The framework for extensive programme assessments has a standard (Standard 9) that relates to monitoring and periodic reviews of programmes.

The changes in the Dutch assessment frameworks have not had any effects on the cyclical character of the external quality assurance (cf. ESG 1.10, *Cyclical external quality assurance*). Degree programmes of institutions of higher education were and are assessed every six years by a committee of independent experts.

Changes in the composition of assessment committees and in the selection, appointment and training of members of assessment committees (ESG 2.4)

The procedure for composing an assessment committee follows the requirements laid down in an NVAO document, which describes, among other things, the experience and expertise a committee should have (*Requirements regarding panel composition within the framework of the accreditation system*). Every committee is expected to have external experts who have expertise in the field or discipline covered by the programme to be assessed. It is obligatory to have a student as one of the committee members.

Formally, an institution convenes a committee. As a rule, institutions delegate this task to QANU. On the basis of a list provided by the institution, QANU approaches the candidate members of the committee on behalf of the institution and takes care of the practical and logistic details. In order to ensure the independence of the committee members, the institution is required to submit the intended composition of the committee to the NVAO for formal approval. This approval by the NVAO was introduced in 2011. In practice, QANU carries out the task of liaising with the NVAO to obtain the required approval on behalf of the institution.

Since the most recent revision, the NVAO's assessment frameworks prescribe that the chair of a committee is trained by the NVAO. Until now, however, the NVAO has not been able to finalize the training programme for chairs. There are no formal requirements when it comes to training the other committee members. QANU distributes relevant information (including the assessment framework to be used, other documents describing formal procedures and guidelines and forms to be used by the committee members) prior to the first committee meeting and provides an extensive introduction to the framework and the working methods of the committee in the first meeting.

The changes in the NVAO's assessment framework had an effect on the procedure for formally appointing the members of an assessment committee (the NVAO has to approve the composition of a committee) and on the training of chairs and secretaries (albeit the training for chairs is still not available), but the composition as such, the selection of committee members and the training of other assessment committee members did not change significantly.

Changes relating to site-visits (ESG 2.3)

The revisions of the NVAO's assessment frameworks had very little effect on the site-visits of assessment committees (apart from the fact that committees conducting a limited programme assessment are not supposed to assess aspects of a programme that are dealt with in the institutional quality assurance assessment). The frameworks list the delegations a committee will meet. This list is the same for all programmes (whether they undergo a limited or an extensive assessment). The only important change compared to the situation before 2011 is a consequence of a guideline introduced by the NVAO on the assessment of final theses or other final products. If a committee concludes that too many theses have unjustly been assessed as 'sufficient' or higher, it is expected to meet with the supervisors of these theses to discuss its criticism and to take into consideration the supervisors' response.

Changes relating to the publication of reports (ESG 2.3)

The revisions of the NVAO's assessment frameworks had no effects on the publication of reports. The NVAO is still obliged to publish both its decisions on the accreditation of programmes and the reports these decisions are based on (produced by quality assurance agencies such as QANU) on its website. QANU does not publish reports of the assessment of degree programmes itself.

Changes relating to follow-up (ESG 2.3)

One of the changes resulting from the revision of the assessment frameworks as of the beginning of January 2011 is the introduction of an improvement period. If an assessment committee assesses a degree programme as 'insufficient' and if the NVAO subsequently decides that the programme does not fulfil the conditions for re-accreditation, the institution offering the programme can apply for an improvement period. If the NVAO decides that the programme should be able to bring about the necessary improvements within a maximum of two years, the programme's current accreditation is extended. The programme is assessed once more one to two years after its original assessment in order to ensure whether it has been able to bring about the necessary improvements. As a rule, QANU organizes these additional assessments if it also carried out the original assessment and supports the committee that conducts them.

Changes relating to the appeals system (ESG 2.7)

The revisions of the NVAO's assessment frameworks had no effects on the appeals system, neither on the procedures QANU uses, nor on the system of external quality assurance as a whole.

Changes relating to thematic analyses and internal quality assurance of the agency (ESG 3.4 and 3.6)

The revisions of the assessment frameworks had no real effects on the production of thematic analyses. The NVAO occasionally makes such analyses. Some of them are available on the NVAO's website. Until now, QANU has not produced any thematic analyses. Some of QANU's committees produce a co-called state of the art report, describing the state of affairs in a discipline from a substantial point of view. As a rule, these state of the art reports are published on QANU's website.

The changes in the frameworks led to changes in QANU's working methods, which had to be adapted to the new situation. The changes as such did not have an effect on the procedures for the procedures for internal quality assurance.

Conclusion

The revisions of the frameworks for the assessment of degree programmes offered by institutions of higher education in the Netherlands led to limited changes in the relation between these frameworks and the European Standards and Guidelines. It seems fair to state that the Dutch system of internal and external quality assurance still conforms to the European standards and guidelines. QANU is convinced that its approach and activities are compliant with these standards and guidelines.

QANU / Sietze Looijenga / Utrecht / January 2016