
QUALITY ASSURANCE NETHERLANDS UNIVERSITIES
(QANU)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between May 2016 and November 2016. This review is QANU's second review; QANU has been a full member of ENQA since 2005 and it is also listed in EQAR since May 2011. The whole process followed the revised *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews as of October 2015*.

The panel for the external review of QANU was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- **Henrik Toft Jensen, (Chair)**, Research Fellow at Roskilde University (RUC), Denmark
- **Maria E. Weber, (Secretary)**, Head of Department of Accreditation & International Affairs, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria
- **André Vyt**, Quality Management Expert (AQARTO Agency), Associate Professor in Human Behaviour, University of Ghent (UGent) and Artevelde University College Belgium, Belgium
- **Simona Dimovska**, master's student in Intellectual Property (LL.M) Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia Steering Committee Member of European Students' Union (ESU)

The review panel considered the evidence provided in QANU's self-assessment report (SAR), the oral evidence during the site visit and additionally requested documents from QANU, before and during the site visit. The panel considered compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* and concluded that QANU fully, substantially or partially complied with them, as follows:

- ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE – partially compliant
- ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS – fully compliant
- ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE – substantially compliant
- ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – partially compliant
- ESG 3.5 RESOURCES – substantially compliant
- ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT – substantially compliant
- ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES – fully compliant
- ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE – substantially compliant
- 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
- ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES – fully compliant
- ESG 2.6 REPORTING – fully compliant
- ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS – substantially compliant

The panel has hereby offered various recommendations and advised QANU to thoroughly consider them, followed by actions to implement them.

Overall, in the light of manifold evidence provided, the panel is satisfied that QANU, for the majority of criteria, is in substantial to full compliance with the ESG. The observations, analyses and conclusions of the review panel in this review report should be used by QANU to further enhance

and improve the quality of its core activities and they shall be considered by ENQA as a basis to decide on the continuation and consolidation of QANU's ENQA membership.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between May 2016 and November 2016.

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 QANU's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge the progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as in line with the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, aiming at continuous enhancement of the agencies.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2010 REVIEW

QANU successfully underwent an ENQA coordinated external review in 2010. The primary focus of the 2010 report was a compliance analysis of QANU against the membership criteria of ENQA.¹ At QANU's request, the report also provided a critical evaluation of QANU's role in the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands. As a result of the overall analysis, the panel found examples of good practice as well as areas of restricted practice, as a result of legislative structures under which QANU has operated and it also identified a number of recommendations where QANU could strengthen its existing quality promotion and control mechanisms. A substantial amount of evidence confirmed that QANU is well-respected, as a high-quality service provider to Dutch universities, and the panel has gained confidence from the evidence available that QANU will continue to hold its position in the foreseeable future. The panel's report of 2010 provided the following findings regarding compliance with the ESG²:

Fully Compliant (ESG 2005)

ESG 2.1: Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures

ESG 2.2: Development of External Quality Assurance Processes

ESG 2.3: Criteria for Decisions

ESG 2.5: Reporting

ESG 2.6: Follow-Up Procedures

ESG 2.7: Periodic Review

ESG 2.8: System-Wide Analysis

ESG 3.1: Use of External Quality Assurance Procedures for Higher Education

ESG 3.2: Official Status

ESG 3.3: Activities

ESG 3.4: Resources

¹ Membership Criterion 1 referenced to ESG 2.1-2.8; ESG 3.1; 3.3. Membership Criterion 2 - ESG 3.2. Membership Criterion 3 - ESG 3.4. Membership Criterion 4 - ESG 3.5. Membership Criterion 5 - ESG 3.6. Membership Criterion 6 - ESG 3.7. Membership Criterion 7 - ESG 3.8 and Membership Criterion 8 covered Miscellaneous.

² Since the review in 2010, the ESG have been revised. The numbers in this chapter refer to the ESG 2005, as in use back then.

Substantially Compliant ESG 2005

ESG 2.4: Process Fit for Purpose

ESG 3.6: Independence

ESG 3.7: External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes

ESG 3.8: Accountability Procedures

With regard to these standards, the 2010 review panel recommended QANU examining the fitness for purpose of its selection processes and nomination of committee members and ensuring the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, in relation to the chair and, particularly, in relation to the role of the chair. QANU was also recommended to review its existing guidelines, procedures and training materials and to repackage them into a more concise set of guidance materials, thus ensuring that its procedures, criteria, processes and decisions operate in a transparent and consistent manner. The 2010 review panel recommended QANU to repackage information on its internal quality measures and processes into a concise Quality Policy to be published on its website. In addition, it was recommended to link the Quality Policy to annual reporting and also to strategic and operational planning processes in order to enhance the capacity to monitor achievements against the mission statement, goals and objectives.³

Partially Compliant ESG 2005

ESG 3.5: Mission Statement

With regard to the mission statement, QANU was recommended to prepare and publish it on the website and replicate it in the core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports. QANU was advised to embed its mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.⁴

Overall comment and finding of 2010

The review panel recommended to the ENQA Board that QANU is found *substantially compliant* with ENQA Membership Criteria. This overall comment was based on the positive conclusion (*fully compliant*), arrived at the most counts constituting requirements for ENQA membership and being the standards under the ESG. In addition, the conclusion was also based on the observation that in *cases where the panel passed a judgment of sufficient compliance*, the responsibility could only be attributed to QANU in part.

In the light of the evidence provided, the review panel was of the opinion that, in the performance of its functions, *QANU was not fully compliant with the ENQA Membership Provisions*. QANU was, however, according to the opinion of the panel, *sufficiently compliant to justify full membership of ENQA*. The *ENQA Membership Criteria, where full compliance has not been achieved, are:*

- ENQA Membership Criterion 1a: **ESG 2.1 Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures & 2.4 Processes Fit for Purpose** (assessed as substantially compliant)
- ENQA Membership Criterion 1b: **Activities (ESG 3.1 Use of External Quality Assurance Procedures for Higher Education, ESG 3.3 Activities)** (assessed as substantially compliant)

³ See also Annex 1.

⁴ See also Annex 1.

- ENQA Membership Criterion 4: **ESG 3.5: Mission Statement** (assessed as partially compliant)
- ENQA Membership Criterion 5: **ESG 3.6: Independence** (assessed as substantially compliant)
- ENQA Membership Criterion 6: **ESG 3.7: External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes** (assessed as substantially compliant)
- ENQA Membership Criterion 7: **ESG 3.8: Accountability Procedures** (assessed as substantially compliant)

The review panel provided QANU with a list of recommendations and underlined that appropriate actions needed to be taken, as far as QANU was empowered to do so, in order to achieve *full compliance with the aforementioned criteria at the earliest opportunity*.⁵ Progress report by QANU was submitted in September 2013 to ENQA. In this progress report, QANU presented and elaborated *in which way and to which extent* the issued recommendations have or have not been implemented.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of QANU 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 QANU was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- **Henrik Toft Jensen, (Chair)**, Research Fellow at Roskilde University (RUC), Denmark
- **Maria E. Weber, (Secretary)**, Head of Department of Accreditation / International Affairs, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria
- **André Vyt**, Quality Management Expert (AQARTO Agency), Associate Professor in Human Behaviour, University of Ghent (UGent) and Artevelde University College Belgium, Belgium
- **Simona Dimovska**, master's student in Intellectual property (LL.M) Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia Steering Committee Member of European Students' Union (ESU)

Mr Henrik Toft Jensen was nominated by the EUA and Mrs Simona Dimovska was nominated by the ESU.

QANU 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. Additional documents requested were provided prior to the site-visit or during the site-visit. Prior to the site visit, 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. Findings from the individual mapping exercise were aligned to the areas of inquiry, which, in consequence, were linked to the specific interview sessions. Prior to the site visit, each panel member was designated to lead a specific interview session, while collecting evidence. Decisions of the panel were reached collectively, led by the Chair and the Secretary. The review panel produced the final report on the basis of SAR, oral evidence given during the site visit, as well as additionally provided documentation prior and during the site visit. QANU had the opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel has confirmed that it was given access to all the documents and interview partners it defined necessary to be consulted during the whole review.

⁵ See Panel Report of 2010, p. 53.

During the entire review, the review panel has drawn severe attention to those areas where the 2010 review report recommended that QANU should take action to ensure full compliance with the ESG and where the prior panel suggested that reflection and action could contribute to QANU's further development and enhancement of the processes and procedures.

Self-assessment report

The decision for renewal of the ENQA membership was taken by QANU's board in a meeting in June 2015. Based upon the decision, the agency started with the drafting process of SAR, which was made under the main coordinating responsibility of QANU's director. It was stated that, as a starting point, the documents issued and delivered as a follow-up, during the last ENQA review, have been taken into consideration.

The review panel learned that QANU's staff has been involved in the whole process by various means. Among these, the following activities have been mentioned: editing, commenting or writing of chapters for SAR, while the main responsibility remained with QANU's management. The review panel learned that lunch meetings had been used to discuss strengths and weaknesses of QANU, to jointly explore future challenges but also to reflect compliance of QANU's work against the ESG. However, the review panel also learned that an explicit discussion regarding compliance of QANU's work with the ESG has not taken place. The review panel learned during the site visit, that QANU expected to be compliant with the ESG because of the fact that QANU has adopted and is operating within the frameworks designed by bodies such as the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

The review panel learned that SAR has been discussed with the board of the agency, but it was not distributed among the agencies' stakeholders due to a lack of time. The lack of time was caused, as the management has stated during the site visit, by the fact that the SAR process, as a whole, has started too late.

However, the review panel would like to state that the outcomes of the 2010 review and the follow-up report to ENQA of 2013 have not been considered further up to 2016 and have not been reflected on in the light of the ESG 2015. The review panel would have appreciated to have found a more self-reflective approach of QANU, as to the extent and ways through which it was striving towards further development and enhancement, especially in the light of the ESG 2015.

Site visit

The site visit was conducted from 19 to 22 June 2016 and it took place in QANU's office in Utrecht. The agenda for the site visit was prepared with the support of QANU's liaison person, i.e. its managing director. After some coordination and fine-tuning, the agenda was finalised. The review panel was able to interview stakeholders, which QANU considered relevant. The site visit included interview sessions with permanent and freelance staff members, QANU's management and QANU's Board, representatives from the competent Ministry, from universities – management level and policy advisors, representatives from QANU's review and assessment panels. The review panel was also in the position to interview a member of the Executive Board and a policy adviser from the NVAO, the association of research universities (VSNU) and the Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW).⁶

⁶ The complete list of interviews can be found in Annex 2.

One interview with a representative from the universities was initially meant to be conducted via Skype; finally it was changed to an interview via phone only.

At the end of the site visit, the review panel held an internal debriefing meeting aiming to formulate preliminary conclusions regarding the level of compliance of QANU with ESG Part 2 and Part 3.

The review panel would like to thank QANU's Secretariat for taking care of all catering and services provided during the site visit.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

As of the SAR, the overall structure of higher education in the Netherlands is laid down in the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research*. This Act, adopted by the Dutch Parliament in 1993, has been the subject of several revisions and additions over the last years, primarily as a result of the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent introduction of bachelor and master programmes and of the accreditation system. The Dutch higher education system has three cycles: bachelor programmes, master programmes and postgraduate programmes, including the programmes leading to a PhD degree.

Higher education in the Netherlands consists of two sectors: the research-based universities and the universities of applied sciences (higher professional education). The particular focus on education provided in these higher education institutions is defined in the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research*: while universities are supposed to prepare students for *independent scientific work in an academic or professional setting*, the institutions within the sector of higher professional education aim at preparing students for a *specific profession or occupation and enable them to function self-consciously in society at large*.

There are fourteen research universities in the Netherlands, including the Open University, which specialises in distance learning programmes. As of the SAR, these universities currently have approximately 260,000 students. They are public institutions that receive public funding. In addition, a number of *designated institutions* are considered part of the university sector, including a university for business administration, four institutes for theology and a humanistic university. There are 37 publicly funded *universities of applied sciences*. Universities of applied sciences have almost 450,000 students. In addition to publicly funded higher education institutions, there are several privately funded higher education institutions that offer programmes at *university of applied science* level.

As of the SAR, prospective students can acquire the entrance qualifications for higher education via two tracks in secondary education: first, via senior general secondary education, which is a track of five years and, second, via university preparatory education, which is a track of six years. By law, prospective students from the second track have access to programmes *offered both by research universities and by universities of applied sciences*. Nevertheless, there are limitations that are laid down in profile requirements, which may hold for a specific programme (students in secondary education choose out of four profiles - culture and society, economics and society, nature and health, nature and technology - one profile, which prepares them for a specific set of degree programmes in higher education) and also the system of the so-called *numerus fixus*, which only applies to a limited number of programmes. Prospective students coming from the first track have direct access to programmes offered by universities of applied sciences. In addition, this group of

prospective students coming from the first track, having completed the first year of a programme at a university of applied sciences or who have obtained a bachelor's degree in such a programme, have direct access to programmes offered by research universities. Overall information regarding the higher education system in the Netherlands can be found under: www.studyinholland.nl.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

External Quality Assurance - higher education institutions/degree programmes (Bachelor/Master)

As of the SAR, the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research* was amended to include accreditation in 2002. As a consequence, the external quality assurance was no longer considered just to be a responsibility of the sector of higher education itself.

With regards to this, QANU is a part of a two-tier system of the external quality assurance system introduced in 2003. NVAO has obtained since 2002, that is 2003, the legal power to award accreditation to study programmes, which fulfil the conditions laid down in the above-mentioned legal act. Dutch and Flemish ministers signed a treaty on accreditation, which resulted in the establishment of NVAO, as a bi-national accreditation organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium). NVAO is responsible for the development of assessment frameworks, adhering to the national legislations. QANU, as one agency, in addition to other external quality assurance agencies, conducts study programme evaluations for the existing research universities, whereas NVAO decides whether the existing study programmes are (re)-accredited.

NVAO itself does not assess the existing study programmes. NVAO has also developed a separate procedure for the accreditation of new study programmes, with the initial accreditation framework being similar to as the one for the existing study programmes.

NVAO's decisions are based upon the assessment panels' reports submitted by the higher education institutions after an assessment has been conducted. Study programmes that meet the criteria are accredited by NVAO for a period of six years. The current assessment framework⁷ for study programmes consists of four standards for a limited programme assessment and 11 standards for an extensive programmes assessment. The institutional quality assurance assessments revolve around five coherent questions. The five questions have been translated into five standards. It might be stated that the standards in place are addressing themes on a more general level, leaving room for interpretation by assessment panels and for the higher education institutions to demonstrate compliance with the standards.

As stated in the SAR, if an institution applies for and passes an institutional quality assurance assessment, its study programmes are assessed on the basis of a framework for limited programme assessments. If an institution fails or does not apply for an institutional assessment, its programmes are assessed on the basis of a framework for extensive programme assessments.

Accreditation of study programmes is of utmost importance; only accredited study programmes are eligible for public/governmental funding and entitled to issue recognized diplomas. All accredited study programmes are centrally registered in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO).

⁷ Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as of 19 December 2014 (NVAO)

External Quality Assurance for higher education institutions and study programmes has been the subject of various discussions and changes concerning its frameworks and rationales since 2003. In 2011, an institutional quality assessment was introduced. The main rationale behind this was that higher education institutions felt that the administrative burden for conducting study programme assessments was too high. As of the SAR, it was argued that aspects of study programmes, which are not programme-specific (e.g. the system of quality assurance, human resource policies, etc.) should be an issue for an institutional assessment. Once assessed positively, these aspects should be considered valid for all study programmes offered by the particular higher education institution.

Institutional assessments are conducted, similarly to the initial assessment for study programmes, solely by NVAO. Also, since 2011, higher education institutions are no longer obliged to involve a quality assurance agency for the assessment of their degree programmes. As it is stated in the SAR, according to the NVAO's assessment framework, the assessment panel *is assisted by an independent, external secretary trained and certified by NVAO. The secretary does not sit on the panel.* Nevertheless, higher education institutions still commission external quality assurance agencies, such as QANU, to conduct the preparations for the assessment of their study programmes. Staff members from such agencies need to be certified by NVAO as secretaries.

In 2015, another amendment of the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research* went into force. The most important change of the NVAO's frameworks for assessments of existing degree programmes was the introduction of assessment groups (study programmes in the same area at several universities) and the division of the standard on assessment into two separate standards: one concerning the system of assessment, and the other concerning the acquired learning outcomes. As reasons for the amendments the following applies: the assessment of various study programmes in the same discipline offered at various higher education institutions assessed by the same panel allows the development of a comparative view of the quality of the programmes. Strengths and weaknesses can be identified in a broader context. The division of the standard on assessment and acquired learning outcomes are considered as the result of increased attention for assessment and for the position and work of the Boards of Examiners. In addition, the amendments of 2015, were also aiming to reduce the administrative burden for conducting external quality assurance. Therefore, the amount of standards has been reduced in the framework for *extensive programme assessment* from sixteen to eleven standards. Higher education institutions were also advised to reduce the maximum pages of their self-assessment reports (critical reflection), from twenty-five to fifteen undergoing a *limited programme assessment* and from forty to twenty undergoing an *extensive assessment*. As far as additional documentation was concerned, such as quantitative data to success rates, the amount was reduced as well.

QANU is, as stated above, operating first and foremost with standards for a *limited programme assessment*, as laid down in the assessment framework from NVAO (Assessment framework for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, December 2014).

Currently, the discussion about a further development and revision of external quality assurance is ongoing, based upon a series of discussions started in 2014. The competent Ministry installed an advisory group, including various stakeholders, to further elaborate on the design of the system of external quality assurance. In February 2016, the Ministry sent a letter to the House of Representatives, outlining a revised plan for the development of the external quality assurance system. The plans foresee a pilot, combining an institutional assessment leading to institutional accreditation and a leaner form of programme assessment in which only the standards dealing with

the intended learning outcomes and the achieved learning outcomes are subject to assessment. At the time of the site visit, the review panel learned that the discussion and process had not been finalised. Hence, outcomes might have an impact on the work of QANU, since it is not clear by now whether this more institutional focused assessment framework will be conducted solely by NVAO or whether quality assurance agencies as well, such as QANU, will be in the position to conduct these procedures. However, during the site-visit, the expert panel learned that a need to continue with study programme assessments and accreditations is emphasized by stakeholders, particularly such as the student organizations.

External Quality Assurance - PhD programmes and research units

In addition to the assessment of study programmes, QANU also conducts assessments of research units/PhD programmes. As far as the assessment of research units is concerned, no explicit legal regulation on these exists. Nevertheless, the association of research universities (VSNU), jointly with the Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), have developed the so-called Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) for the assessment of research units. The SEP is used for the assessment of research units within universities, but also for research conducted within the institutes that are linked to the KNAW or the NWO. Since its introduction, the SEP has been revised several times. The current fifth version is valid as of 2015 until 2021. As the SAR states, the primary aim of assessments, based upon the SEP, is *to reveal and confirm the quality and the relevance of the research to society and to improve these where necessary*. A research unit is considered being a research group, a research institute, a research cluster or all the research carried out within a faculty. The assessment is based upon three criteria: *research quality, relevance to society and validity*. Additionally to these three criteria, two further aspects are taken into consideration if a research unit/faculty is offering PhD training programmes: *research integrity and PhD training programmes*. A research unit/faculty needs to produce a self-assessment report, including a reflection on its PhD training programmes and on how supervision for its PhD candidates is provided. As stated in the SAR, an assessment considers the institutional context of the PhD training programmes (selection and admission procedures, programme content and structure, supervision and effectiveness of the programme and supervision plans, quality assurance, guidance of PhD candidates to the job market, duration, success rate, exit numbers and career prospects).

A panel assesses the first three aforementioned criteria as *excellent, very good, good or unsatisfactory*. The additional aspects are assessed in qualitative descriptions.

The review panel of the ENQA review has reflected on how far SEP is addressing the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance process described in Part 1 of the ESG. This is because *PhD training programmes* and the *supervision of PhD candidates* are considered to be part of teaching and learning processes in higher education, as defined in the ESG. Additionally, PhD qualifications are part of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Reflections and conclusions will be delivered in the later part of this report.

QANU

In 2002, the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research was amended to include accreditation.

As a result, the Board of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) decided, in December 2002, that its department for quality assurance would be transformed into an independent organisation, a foundation without, as it is stated in the SAR, “any formal links with any

Dutch research university". In 2004, QANU was formally founded. Based upon agreement, QANU would furthermore continue activities undertaken by the VSNU's Department for Quality Assurance, but the research universities were not obliged to use the services provided by QANU. QANU is, considered, first and foremost, as a facilitator organisation, providing services related to (external) quality assurance to universities in the Netherlands, such as the accreditation of study programmes within the frame of the so-called limited degree programme accreditation.

QANU'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

QANU consists of a board, a director, a deputy director who also acts as a coordinator of assessments of research units (SEP), a senior project manager who coordinates assessments which fall under the NVAO framework (assessment of degree programmes/limited programme assessment), project managers (permanent and freelance) who support panels (as certified secretaries), and secretarial support staff.

QANU's board legally represents the agency. QANU's board bears the overall responsibility for all the projects, activities and it establishes core policies, strategies and priorities. In addition, the board also takes responsibility over, as stated in the SAR, practical issues which are directly related to QANU's activities. In particular, the board discusses the quality of assessment reports produced by the panels with the support of QANU's project staff. The board of QANU consists of six members with experience in higher education. The members of the current board are all in their second term of office. The board convenes four times a year.

The board has delegated part of its tasks and responsibilities to the director. The director is responsible for QANU's day-to-day operations - the executive management, monitoring and assuring progress within projects and activities of the agency. The director is also responsible for human resources and the financial management of QANU. In addition, the director acts as a secretary of the board of QANU. This task includes the preparation of board meetings in close cooperation with the chair of the board, drafting policy documents, annual reports, budget and financial reports, and the coordination of external representational activities of the board. On a monthly basis, the chair of the board and the director meet to discuss ongoing matters. The director meets on a biweekly basis with the deputy director and the coordinator of operational affairs as well as with the coordinators of assessments to discuss general progress of projects and also the division of tasks among project managers. QANU's senior management contributes to acquisitions and development of new projects and to the application of QANU's approach in sectors outside higher education, which is currently not in the focus of QANU's activities.

Every fortnight, QANU's staff gathers for an internal meeting devoted to several purposes. First, to provide information about internal/external developments. Second, to discuss questions and problems that have arisen in projects or during site visits.

QANU's project managers are responsible for the progress and results of specific projects, basically assessment procedures (degree programmes and/or research assessment). The tasks of project managers include the coordination and management of assessments and support to the work of panels. The project managers, being certified secretaries, write the reports containing the panel's assessment. In addition, project managers also have the responsibility towards the development, monitoring, planning of assessments and their budgetary control. QANU has a limited number of project managers with a permanent position. The majority of QANU's staff works part-time. The only employee who works full-time is QANU's director. QANU needs to regularly involve freelance project

managers. Freelance project managers produce approximately 15 percent of all reports. They are expected to support an assessment panel during a site visit, including the production of a report on the panel's findings and conclusions. QANU underlines that it has established a network of freelancers, who are familiar with QANU's approach and who conform to the standards for quality and professionalism that QANU expects.

QANU'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

QANU has formulated its mission in accordance with its Statutes. QANU is a quality assurance agency, which provides services to research universities in the Netherlands.

As outlined above, QANU is one of the quality assurance agencies, which is offering services to the research universities for the conduction of study programme assessment. Regardless of changes introduced in 2011, the agency considers itself, as an organisation, facilitating the vast majority of programme assessments for research universities, with estimations of a market share going from 80 to 90% of the assessments.

As far as the assessment of programmes is concerned, QANU is following the requirements and formal framework as defined by NVAO. In case of the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes), QANU is referring to the SEP.

During the last five years, QANU has also carried out activities that fall outside the range of its two core activities. Activities falling under this scope basically appeal to the knowledge and expertise of QANU's project managers in the area of internal/external quality assurance. For instance, QANU has organised workshops for university staff preparing external assessment procedures (writing self-assessment reports/critical reflections). In the past, QANU also organised the assessment of the exam institute for financial services by using a methodology similar to those of study programme assessments. QANU participated in the assessment of training programmes of general practitioners. Within this assessment primarily, QANU's senior staff has been involved as chairs of audit teams. QANU has also contributed to the development of an assessment framework for the *Dutch Order of Lawyers* and has contributed in the latest revision of SEP. Recently, QANU is contributing to the development of an assessment framework for the *Council for Primary Education*.

As far as the international activities are concerned, QANU has participated in TEMPUS projects funded by the European Commission, aiming at the improvement of internal/external quality assurance in higher education or at developing sector-specific qualification frameworks (e.g. for information sciences). QANU is cooperating on a regular basis with the University of Curaçao by supporting them with the assessment of various degree programmes, midterm reviews and providing training of their staff regarding the preparation of a critical reflection for upcoming assessments/or midterm reviews.

So far, QANU has not conducted external quality assurance procedures/cross border quality assurance in other countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). As it is stated in the SAR, QANU has not been successful in systematically acquiring projects outside the Netherlands. In its SAR, the argumentation is brought forward that probably the high daily rates QANU charges for its project managers might be seen as success-inhibiting.

QANU'S FUNDING

QANU does not receive any basic funding or financial support from the *Dutch Ministry of Education*, NVAO or any other institution. QANU is fully dependent on the revenues from assessments and other externally funded projects. QANU has adopted a financial policy to add positive results to the general operating reserve, thus creating a financial buffer that enables QANU to cover periods in which the number of projects it can acquire decreases. QANU aims at compensating such decreases in the number of assessments by other projects in sectors outside higher education, but QANU has not been able to generate a substantial income from projects outside its core area of activity.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF QANU 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.

2010 Review recommendation “QANU should prepare and publish a definitive mission statement, which is to be published explicitly on QANU website and replicated in the core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports. QANU should ensure that its definitive mission statement addresses the ENQA criterion guidelines for ESG 3.5. QANU should embed its definitive mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved” (2010, p.39f.).

2010 Panel conclusion: ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education, ESG 3.3 Activities - both fully compliant; ESG 3.5 Mission statement - partially compliant.

Evidence

As a follow-up from the 2010 ENQA review, QANU has taken various measures, such as improving and updating its mission statement, while keeping the core the same. The mission and also the strategy for the near future were discussed during 2012/2013 with the board and the staff. The review panel learned that the board has adopted the outcomes of these discussions. As a result, QANU presented that the main approach to their strategy and activities remains as described in 2010. It is stated in the SAR that QANU’s core activity is to conduct assessments of degree programmes, while following the framework provided by NVAO, and conduct assessments of research units (including PhD programmes) offered by research universities in the Netherlands.

QANU’s mission statement is published on the agency’s website. The mission of QANU refers to both mentioned activities, underlining that QANU is aiming to contribute to further improvement of quality of scientific education and research in the Netherlands. Additionally, it is stated that QANU utilises expertise and experience in European and international projects and networks within scientific education and research as well as within other sectors outside scientific education and research. The review panel learned that QANU is referring to its mission statement in its annual reports and other documents.

With regard to the utilisation of expertise and experience, the review panel found that the important distinction between external quality assurance activities (assessment of study programmes/research units, incl. PhD programmes) and consultancy services is made. Activities falling under the latter mentioned scope contribute only to a minor extent to QANU’s activities. In particular, QANU referred here to consulting activities offered to higher education institutions, such

as support to the so-called mid-term reviews and writing critical reflections. Additionally, QANU has been active in some international projects financed by the European Commission (Tempus) in the past. However, involvement in such activities is not in the core focus of QANU.

The review panel has learned from the SAR and during the site visit that QANU does not consider itself strongly as a mission-driven agency. It was stated that due to the fact that QANU is, as far as external quality assurance activities in the narrow sense are addressed, bound by formal frameworks (NVAO, SEP), which serve as a basis for conduction of its work. QANU has stated that its policies and processes are in line with the frameworks mentioned.

In its SAR and during the site visit, it became evident that QANU does not have a formalised stakeholder approach in its governance. There is, for example, no student involvement in the board of QANU. All the board members are academics from the research universities. The review panel learned, as a recommendation in 2010 review, that QANU was asked to consider expanding its board to include a student representative member. The review panel found that the recommendation was discussed, however, the board decided not to implement the recommendation. The board felt that student interests are sufficiently taken into account in the assessment process as a whole. As far as the student involvement is concerned, however, in the assessment process as such, it needs to be stated that, only according to the framework of NVAO, students are part of expert panels. The assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes) does not foresee a student involvement (PhD candidates).

Analysis

QANU is concerned, first and foremost, with assessment of degree programmes and research units (incl. PhD programmes), while the other mentioned activities are currently not in the narrow scope.

As stated above, QANU has set measures to improve and update its mission statement in the light of 2010 recommendations. However, the review panel found that the mission statement is not consequently translated into QANU's daily operations. QANU should further strive to embed its mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes in order to better ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.

With regard to its set aim to utilise expertise and experience in European and international projects, the review panel found that QANU is not actively involved in esp. international quality assurance activities. The review panel learned during the site visit, that QANU is also not involved in international debates regarding quality assurance (e.g. such as the implementation of the revised ESG 2015). The review panel is convinced that QANU would benefit from participating in international quality assurance activities, projects, conferences, etc. The review panel is of the opinion that exchange of experiences provided in such settings would have positive impact on its day-to-day operations.

QANU considers itself, to a certain extent, as an agency driven by tradition. The panel would have liked to have seen further explicit reflection on how to use/translate the mission into a strategy and into day-to-day operation.

An organizational chart with a profiling of functions has not been produced and discussed by QANU until now. Nevertheless, the review panel was provided, on request, with a preliminary organisational chart produced during the site visit by QANU's director.

A broad stakeholder involvement is not fully ensured, due to the fact that there is no students' involvement in the governance (board of QANU) nor in the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes). In addition, involvement of labour market/employers is also not reflected in the governance of QANU.

As it was stated above, QANU is, as far as external quality assurance activities are concerned, formally bound by frameworks defined and issued by other parties (NVAO, SEP). The frameworks serve as a basis for conduction of its work. The panel is convinced that the external quality assurance activities, according to which QANU operates, take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG as overall satisfactory. However, the review panel has indicated areas for improvement in relation to Part 2 of the ESG, which will be outlined in the later part of this report in detail.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to fine-tune its mission and to clearly strive for translation of it into its day-to-day operation. The review panel recommends working on an organisational chart, which, as a starting point, could also support visibility of the mission statement within the agency as such.

The review panel recommends using the mission statement in place for further development of strategic planning approaches, including stakeholder opinions in a formalised way.

The review panel recommends considering and expanding its own board to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement in its own governance. QANU should in particular strive for inclusion of student representative members in its board. In addition, QANU should impact, *as a stakeholder*, the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in the experts' panels in the SEP.

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.

2010 Review panel conclusion: ESG 3.2 Official Status - fully compliant

Evidence

The SAR indicated that QANU is a foundation registered in the Netherlands. Its aims and objectives are laid down in its Statutes, additionally, with the way of governance being also defined.

Analysis

QANU is, in addition to the other agencies in the Netherlands, recognised by Dutch research universities as an agency facilitating and supporting the assessment of programmes and research units (incl. PhD programmes). With regard to the latter, QANU explained to the review panel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain market shares. QANU considers its daily rates as relatively high.

Additionally, QANU has critically reflected in its SAR and during the site visit about its questioning as to why the formal position of quality assurance agencies has disappeared from the NVAO's framework after the revision of the external quality assurance system in 2011. Since 2011, universities are no longer obliged to involve a quality assurance agency for the assessment of degree programmes. Universities are obliged to carry out all preparations for an assessment themselves, however, according to the revision of the NVAO framework in 2011, an assessment panel needs to be assisted by an independent external secretary, trained and certified by NVAO. QANU is questioning the legitimate reasons for this. Agencies and therefore QANU as well continue to play an indispensable role in the assessment of programmes. According to the given legal framework, the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, this cannot be taken over by NVAO, other organisations or individual secretaries. QANU considers itself as a core partner for conducting of assessment procedures for programmes in the sector of research universities in the Netherlands.

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.

2010 Review recommendation: The review panel from 2010 recommended that QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process of committee members to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the chair. (As recommended under ESG 2.4 – Fitness for Purpose). QANU should ensure there are sufficient measures in place internally to mitigate against concerns that threshold standards of domain-specific frameworks are being heavily influenced by the sector. QANU should clarify the procedures employed in the development and monitoring of domain-specific frameworks to ensure they remain at a sufficiently high standard, nationally and internationally, and that rigidity in the application of domain-specific frameworks does not unduly stifle innovative programmes which deviate from consensual mainstream (2010, p. 44).

2010 Panel conclusion: ESG 3.6 Independence - substantially compliant

Evidence

Concerning the *nomination*, selection procedures of panel members for the assessment of programmes, the effect of the revision of external quality assurance in the Netherlands in 2011 was that higher education institutions themselves are being primarily responsible for the *composition* of a review panel and not quality assurance agencies, such as QANU, nor NVAO.

However, QANU like other agencies (or independent secretaries) can convene a panel on behalf of a research university. By doing so, QANU is following the requirements laid down in the framework of NVAO and the SEP. The NVAO framework defines that a higher education institution convening the panel, appoints a secretary and subsequently presents the panel to NVAO for final approval. Notwithstanding this, the review panel is convinced that, if QANU on behalf of a research university is in charge to convene a panel, QANU ensures independence from the institution. As far as secretaries are concerned, it is taken into consideration that QANU's project managers have no affiliations with particular institutions. However, the final step for approval of the composition of a

panel as well as the checks of independence of nominees of the given higher education institution, as convened by QANU are done by NVAO.

In the case of SEP procedures, the board of the university under review is responsible for setting up the procedure and assembling an assessment panel as well. The board and the research unit of a university ensure that panel members match the defined requirements and it also appoints the panel in the end. In this case, QANU seeks for approval of the concrete research unit; although, the potential panel members have to, prior to that, be approved by the university. QANU takes care that, in both cases, project managers (secretaries) are independent of the given higher education institution.

As far as the recommendations from 2010 regarding the domain-specific frameworks are concerned, the review panel learned that, since the amendment of external quality assurance in 2011, the NVAO's assessment frameworks prescribe that programmes' critical reflections have to contain an appendix dealing with the domain-specific framework. By this, the procedure for establishing a domain-specific framework of reference for an assessment has changed since the review from 2010. QANU has, accordingly, adopted its working methods to comply with the changes.

Concerning the evidence regarding QANU's *independence*, the review panel needs to state that the SAR does not provide sufficient statements or evidence along with the operational and organisational independence as well as the independence of formal outcomes. SAR has provided the overall statements, which have been completed during the site visit.

The review panel found that QANU's **organisational independence** is in place, due to its being a registered foundation in the Netherlands, which is fulfilling its legal requirements. The board of QANU holds the ultimate responsibility for the various assessments and activities of the agency. The members of the board have, beyond doubt, the expertise and experience within the domain of higher education in the Netherlands. The board consists of members, who are active or retired academics, such as former rectors of research universities, deans of faculties and members of boards of universities or governmental officials. However, a wider range of stakeholders (students, employers, etc.) are not represented.

Concerning its **operational independence**, QANU is operating in line with the procedures defined by the two mentioned frameworks (NVAO, SEP) according to which the agency organises and conducts assessment procedures. With the support of an internal protocol, the so-called *Quick Reference Guide*, covering relevant documentation and a reference guide for the conduction of assessments, QANU is aiming to guarantee professional conduct, consistency, transparency and **operational independence**. As already stated above, QANU takes care of the composition of panels, by using a list of potential panel members submitted by research universities (or jointly agreed on by various institutions in case cluster assessments have to be conducted) or the research unit (incl. PhD programmes) under assessment. The board of the university under review is responsible for setting up the procedure and assembling an assessment panel. In case of the assessment of study programmes, once a panel has been convened, the names are submitted to NVAO for final approval.

Concerning **independence of formal outcomes**, the review panel learned that, as far as programme assessments are concerned, NVAO takes the final decision based on the report written by the secretary of the review and approved by the panel. Before the report on the study programme assessment is submitted to NVAO, the university is asked for checking factual inaccuracies. With regard to the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes) after the site visit, a draft report,

written by the panel (supported by the secretary), is submitted to the director of the research unit for checking of factual inaccuracies. The final report of the panel is submitted to the board of the higher education institution, which the research unit belongs to. The board comments on the contents of the report for further consideration.

QANU has no formal decision-making role in both assessment procedures.

Analysis

In the 2010 review, the standard dealing with independence was found substantially compliant. The review panel of the 2016 review did not see itself in the position to conclude with a different judgment, even for a different reason. While in 2010 the review panel emphasised QANU measures with regard to domain-specific frameworks, the review panel of 2016 concluding in a different way, however, came to the same judgment.

The review panel is of the opinion, according to the evidence gathered, that QANU is operating in line with the procedures defined by the two mentioned frameworks and it also appreciates the fact that QANU has developed an internal protocol, the *Quick Reference Guide*, which is covering relevant documentation (e.g. flow charts and checklists for programme assessment, SEP Statement of impartiality and confidentiality 2015-2021, Guideline or critical reflection for a limited programme assessment 2015, Guideline for requirements regarding panel composition 2015, etc.) supporting professional conduct, consistency, transparency and operational independence.

QANU is, with regard to its central governance body (the Board), not open to stakeholders other than higher education representatives. Because of the narrow scope of stakeholders in the Board of QANU and the affiliation of some Board members with research universities, which are subjects of the assessments conducted by QANU, a risk regarding client-based pressures on policy- and decision-making processes might occur. The review panel has long discussed whether affiliations of QANU's Board members to universities could cause a conflict with the idea of QANU having full organisational independence or not. The review panel concluded that the agency needs to strive for policies in place demonstrating also that Board members equal to project managers (secretaries) are independent of the given higher education institution. However, as a first step, a wider stakeholder involvement in the core governance body of QANU would be a benefit.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends reflecting on QANU's governance structure in order to safeguard the organisational independence more thoroughly. The review panel likes to repeat its recommendation regarding expanding QANU's board to a wider stakeholder involvement, such as a broader stakeholder inclusion with a student and an employer. These stakeholders in QANU's governance structure would support its acting as independent and autonomous agency.

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.

2010 Review panel conclusion: ESG 2.8 System-Wide Analysis - fully compliant

Evidence

The review panel learned that QANU is not up-to-date with analysing the general findings of their external quality assurance activities on a regular basis. Nevertheless, over the years, QANU has finalised several analysis, the so-called *state of the art reports*, aiming to describe the state of affairs in a specific discipline. These reports are produced only in those cases when panels assess all the programmes in a specific discipline (cluster assessments). QANU is producing these reports at the request of research universities participating in assessment. However, as QANU has stated in its SAR and as underlined during the site visit, not every panel receives such a request. If the state of the art reports are produced, QANU publishes them on the agency's website after the institutions participating in the assessment have explicitly approved the publication.

QANU has not produced *thematic analysis in a narrow sense*, neither for programme assessments nor for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes). The review panel learned that, in order to analyse general findings of their assessment activities, QANU has organised meetings with the review panels to discuss relevant procedural aspects. In particular, the review panel learned that QANU has discussed with panels the assessment scales in place, especially those for the assessment of programmes. Findings and conclusion of these meetings have been incorporated in a policy paper (*Towards a more effective and reliable accreditation system, 2014*) or in articles written by the director, which have been published in the Dutch journal *ho-management* in 2015. These articles were dealing with the changing role of the *Board of Examiners* in the assessment of degree programmes and also on the Minister's plan for further development of the system of external quality assurance.

The review panel was surprised to find a statement in the SAR expressing that there are no clear reasons for producing thematic analysis. In addition, the review panel found that there might be a prevailing opinion that to some extent thematic analysis might remain solely in the responsibility of NVAO. In the SAR and during the site visit, QANU admitted that there are opportunities for improvement regarding a more systematic approach towards thematic analysis.

Analysis

As of the evidence provided, the review panel concluded that QANU has no active approach towards producing thematic analysis in a narrow sense. Overall, the review panel concluded that with the hesitating approach towards producing thematic analysis, QANU is limiting itself, being a core stakeholder within the given national external quality assurance system. QANU is conducting a large share of programme assessments (NVAO) as well as a significant part of research assessments (incl. PhD programmes).

QANU has obtained, due to its active role in conducting of assessments (both programmes - especially cluster assessment and research units as well) valuable experience and expertise, which needs to be reflected on in regularly published reports, describing and analysing general findings of external quality assurance activities and procedures in place. Thorough and careful analysis of on-

site gathered information needs to be evaluated in order to support overall developments, trends and areas of good practice, which can also be used to point out difficulties and challenges.

The review panel is aware of the fact that QANU is a rather small agency. However, this should not lead to the assumption that there will not be enough resources to either further develop the area of thematic analysis, in a systematic way, or to actively produce such analysis in the future. A stronger approach towards thematic analysis would generate a benefit for the staff members; input for thematic analysis will result from their experience gained from the assessment procedures conducted.

Thematic analysis based upon QANU's experience can provide support to the further development of quality assurance policies and processes on a national level.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to take up a pro-active and formalised role with regard to thematic analysis.

The review panel especially recommends using the experience of project managers gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct the thematic analysis in the narrow sense.

The review panel recommends QANU to intensify exchange of experiences with other stakeholders, such as NVAO, the Ministry and universities, on a systematic basis, in order to further jointly develop the system of external quality assurance.

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.

2010 Review conclusion: ESG 3.4 Resources - fully compliant

Evidence

The review panel learned that, while the SAR was mainly dealing with financial resources, a self-reflective analysis regarding QANU's human resources was missing. The review panel has appreciated meetings with competent and experienced staff members and it was also able to collect missing evidence in the SAR in these meetings.

As far as **financial resources** are concerned, the review panel is aware of the fact that QANU does not receive any form of structural funding from the Dutch government or any other institution. The financial resources are generated, first and foremost, out of revenues from conducted assessments. This, in return, means that resources vary from year to year, depending on the assignments QANU acquires.

The review panel has learned that QANU is holding a share of around 80 to 90% of the programme assessments in the sector of research universities. Expressed in numbers, since 2010, QANU has assessed around 1185 programmes in 144 assessments (majority cluster assessments). According to

QANU, the years of 2012 and 2013 have been the so-called peak years due to the high amount of assessments to have been conducted.

The review panel learned that QANU's finances of 2015 have resulted in a negative annual statement. This was explained with an uneven distribution of assessments of degree programmes over the years. QANU explained to the review panel that this uneven distribution occurred with the changes in the external quality assurance procedures in the Netherlands. The review panel learned that QANU would like to see NVAO creating a more even distribution of assessments across the years. Hence, the review panel learned, in its discussion with the stakeholders, that NVAO solely is not in the position to make lengthening/shortening of assessment periods, due to the responsibility of the Ministry as well.

It was emphasised, more or less, that all stakeholders together (with higher education institutions, the Ministry and quality assurance agencies) need to jointly solve the issue of even distribution of assessment terms. However, according to QANU, this was missed so far, instead the revised assessment schedules led to an even more uneven distribution of assessments. Thus creating, as it is stated in SAR, bigger differences in the workload for quality assurance agencies as well as for the NVAO itself. QANU underlined that these particular schedules affect the amount of assessments the agency will be able to conduct in the future, which, in return, will also impact QANU's financial perspective.

However, the review panel learned that QANU projects a positive financial result again after 2017, allowing the agency once more to strengthen its financial reserves as of 2018.

As far as QANU's research unit assessments (incl. PhD programmes) are concerned, their size and complexity is varying. While some assessments look at single research institutes or a limited number of research units, others take specific disciplines by all universities in the Netherlands into account. These, in particular, have an impact on the revenues generated.

The review panel learned that QANU does not want to be solely dependent on its assessment activities. Therefore, it is aiming to compensate possible decreases in the number of assessments by being engaged in projects outside the higher education sector. However, QANU has not been able to generate a substantial income from such project activities. As stated above, the reason is seen in the daily rates, which are considered to be relatively high, when it comes to assessments in countries outside the Netherlands. At the same time, the relatively small size of the agency does not allow to focus extensively on activities beside the core ones.

During the site visit and in SAR, it was expressed that an uneven assessment distribution leads to peaks and valleys in working load, which, in return, also affects the **human resources** situation of QANU. While, in phases of peaks, the agency needs to engage additional freelance project managers, it needs to provide its permanent staff in the so-called valley periods with attractive and challenging tasks as well.

In order to be in the position to better understand QANU's organisational structure, the review panel requested an organisational chart before the site visit. The review panel issued this request, due to the fact that an organisational chart was neither found in the supporting documents of the SAR nor available on the public area of the website, where the agency introduces itself. The review panel was supported with a first draft prepared by QANU's director during the site-visit.

As far as permanent staff is concerned, the review panel learned that except for the managing director (1), all project managers (8, whereby one project manager left the agency by 1 June 2016), deputy manager (1), secretariat (2), etc. are engaged on a part-time basis.

The review panel appreciates the fact that QANU is putting processes in place aiming to develop staff competence. For example, performance interviews are conducted on a cyclic basis by QANU's director with all staff. It is stated in the SAR that outcomes of these interviews can be that a staff member follows a course or training to further develop specific knowledge or skills. QANU sometimes organises in-house courses geared towards the needs of its project managers. For example, it is stated in the SAR that, in the autumn of 2015, QANU has organised training in educational sciences from the perspective of assessments of degree programmes. This training was also attended by the core of QANU's freelance project managers.

Equally to all independent secretaries in the Dutch system, QANU's permanent and freelance project managers undergo a two-day training organised by NVAO in order to be eligible to act as a review secretary. Only secretaries certified by NVAO are in the position to support expert panels. However, the review panel learned that according to QANU's managing director, these training sessions do not provide the agencies' staff with additional knowledge and competences relevant for their tasks. It was explained that the agency itself has training approaches (e.g. mentoring) in place covering the relevant issues and topics. The project management staff (freelance and permanent) to whom the review panel spoke appreciated the provided global training for secretaries as valuable supplement to the introduction provided by QANU.

The review panel has also realised the need for a more systematic approach towards staff inclusion and participation in European/international quality assurance conferences, workshops etc. With regard to this, the review panel has learned that QANU staff has not participated in workshops lately dealing with revised ESG at the European/international level. Additionally, as stated briefly before, the existing expertise and knowledge of staff should be used for the preparation of thematic analysis - especially in the periods with low frequency of assessments. This would eventually minimize the danger of losing human capital in such periods, as stated in the SAR.

Overall, the review panel appreciated the intensive discussions with QANU's project managers (freelance and permanent) and its senior management during the site visit. The review panel is convinced that QANU has adequately qualified and competent staff. All staff members demonstrated adequate knowledge and experience relevant for the conduction of various assessment procedures. The review panel would like to emphasise that it met staff with increasingly relevant capabilities for the analysis of day-to-day quality assurance activities on a meta-level.

The vast majority of interviewed stakeholders were explicitly speaking in positive terms about QANU's staff, although some also pointed out variability in efficiency of working.

Analysis

In the 2010 review, the standard dealing with resources was judged as fully compliant. However, the review panel of the 2016 review did not see itself in the position to conclude with the same judgment. The reason can be seen in the fact that formalised approaches and procedures with regard to human resource management as well as with clear strategic approaches dealing with identified peaks and valleys in terms of assessment forecasts, were missing.

Regardless of the given fact, that QANU is in the position to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an obviously effective and also efficient manner, it does not explicitly make provisions for addressing a wider scope of work, which quality assurance agencies should take into consideration as well. The review panel especially identified the need to strengthen QANU's capacities towards a systematised conduction of thematic analysis. QANU might share its experience with other organisation of this size; human resource processes appear likely to be installed on an ad-hoc basis or, more precisely, on a face-to-face basis. However, the review panel is of the opinion that QANU would benefit from a more transparent systematisation of its human resource processes, starting from visualisation of its organisational structure (organigram or organisational chart) available internally and, as a second step, on the website of the agency as well.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends formalising various human resource management approaches into one document.

The review panel recommends using of experience and qualification of QANU's staff in order to deploy competences, skills and knowledge for thematic analysis, participation in European/international projects, workshops etc. relevant for quality assurance.

The review panel recommends developing a cooperative approach regarding the training of secretaries jointly with NVAO.

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.

2010 Review recommendations: - QANU should repackage information on its internal quality measures and processes into a concise Quality Policy to be published on its website. QANU should link its Quality Policy to its annual reporting, strategic and operational planning processes to enhance its capacity to monitor achievement against its mission statement, goals and objectives. (2010, p. 51).

2010 Panel conclusion: ESG 3.8 Accountability Procedures - substantially compliant

Evidence

Having analysed the follow-up report of the ENQA 2010 review, the review panel learned that QANU has evaluated and revised its procedures for internal and external quality assurance to some extent. Some of the recommendations concerning QANU's internal quality assurance processes and procedures, issued in 2010, discussed in the follow-up report from 2013, have been briefly outlined in the SAR. In the SAR, the following elements have explicitly been stated:

- Regular discussions about existing procedures and regulations in bi-weekly staff meetings and additional meetings to discuss important issues and relevant developments in the system of external quality assurance in-depth (for example, a revised framework or a new

- guideline from NVAO, application and elaboration of the NVAO's decision rules); from time to time, QANU also invites experienced freelance project managers to some of the meetings;
- Discussions of issues that arise during (preparations for) site visits or in the production of reports with colleagues or in the staff meetings. If necessary, such discussions may lead to revisions of existing procedures;
 - Assessments of draft reports by colleagues and consultations of colleagues, when necessary, (for example, in case of a deviation from a procedure); draft reports produced by QANU's project manager are assessed by a colleague, who was not involved in the project on the basis of a checklist containing a number of relevant quality criteria. If possible, this assessment takes place before the draft report is sent to the programmes to identify any factual errors.
 - An evaluation of a selection of the assessment reports by the board of QANU; twice a year, QANU's board reads a sample of reports during that period. Prior to the board meeting discussing questions and observations and formulating suggestions for improvement, QANU's director makes a selection from the reports and regularly asks the board to reflect on specific questions or issues.
 - Evaluation of assessments after the reports of the assessment panel have been finalised and submitted to the respective research universities. The project manager invites both the members of the assessment panel and the contact persons of the programmes assessed to provide comments to the assessment. An evaluation of a selection of the assessment reports by the board of QANU is done twice a year. QANU's board reads a sample of reports that have been finalised. In addition to the evaluations of individual assessments, QANU organises meetings with the chairs of the assessment panels *once every three to four years*. In these meetings, the chairs are asked to share their experiences and to comment on QANU's approach towards assessments of degree programmes and research units and on the quality of the support they received from QANU.
 - There is a follow-up of the results and outcomes of these evaluations by QANU's director and the project manager, when necessary.

During the site visit, the review panel was provided with more evidence. The review panel learned that QANU has some procedures and processes in place aiming to support, reflect and improve its own day-to-day operations.

The review panel learned that QANU produces annual reports demonstrating accountability for its activities, revenues and expenses. Annual financial statements are assessed by an external auditor before approved by QANU's board.

The review panel learned that a lot of effort regarding quality standards is put on assessment reports; QANU has introduced various steps for monitoring and improvement of panel reports. Several of the documents are derived from guidelines issued by NVAO. The overall aim of QANU is to produce assessment reports having an added value for degree programmes and for research units; namely, to be able to also provide, (in addition to panel's assessment), advice and suggestions for further improvement.

The review panel was introduced to QANU's *Quick Reference Guide*. This document is aiming to support procedural steps, interlinking various documents relevant for the conduction of assessment procedures, both degree programmes and research units (incl. PhD programmes). During the discussion with QANU's project managers, the review panel learned that QANU is currently

introducing software, more specifically, a knowledge/document management system, which will replace the *Quick Reference Guide (collection of relevant documents)*.

However, internal quality assurance manual or policy is not in place, and valuable processes, e.g. related to human resources, briefing of panels, collegial feedback on draft reports, etc. are, as far as evidence was discussed and demonstrated, lacking written formalisation. The review panel found that QANU does not have an integrated quality management system in which all important/relevant aspects find their place.

While QANU has, even though not documented, procedures in place safeguarding the quality assessment panel reports, the review panel was surprised not to have found systematised approaches gaining feedback from the assessment procedures conducted. As stated above, an evaluation of the assessments is made on the basis of information provided by the panel members and representatives of the programmes that have been assessed.

The review panel has learned that QANU is, as stated above, in some periods dependent on a network of freelance project managers. A specific attention, for developing the internal quality measures needed, was not put forward. In the SAR, it was stated that, it is difficult for QANU to monitor the quality of the work of these freelance project managers. The review panel has learned that QANU has developed a sound process regarding hiring new staff members. At least two interviews are conducted before new staff members get appointed. The first interview is conducted with two staff members (experienced project managers), while the second is done with the director. It is stated in the SAR that potential project managers are asked to submit written work, as evidence of their writing skills. The review panel learned about QANU having a good practice of mentoring/job shadowing system in place. As stated in the SAR and reconfirmed during the site visit, new project managers are assigned to a more experienced senior staff member, who acts as their mentor. New project managers initially attend a site visit, as an observer, sometimes with a small task. During their first site visit, they are accompanied by a senior project manager, who is able to solve any problems that may arise. The review panel also became aware of well-organised processes in place to attract and also integrate, in succession, freelance project managers into QANU's working methods and approaches. However, the process in place should be formalised in writing.

An internal quality assurance policy or manual is not available on the website of QANU.

Analysis

The review panel concluded from the evidence provided that some of the recommendations issued in 2010 have been followed up since then. However, as already stated in the follow-up report from 2013, even though QANU is aiming at improving its procedures for internal and external quality assurance, with a view to developing an overall Quality Policy, the review panel from the 2016 review concluded that QANU does have some procedures for managing its assessment procedures in place. A reference guide supports the project managers in the administration of assessment.

The review panel learned that central for QANU is the (good quality) panel report. This core process is guided and monitored with various accompanying procedures. These are collegial assessments of draft reports, discussions in staff meetings and evaluation of assessment reports by the board. However, QANU's internal quality assurance measures are not compiled into a described quality policy or an integrated quality manual. The various measures and processes in place are also not mapped against the (revised) ESG. With regard to feedback from external stakeholders, mainly the

qualitative approaches are in place. A systematically applied approach regarding the follow-up of results and outcomes from feedback provided is not in place. In order to support a continuous improvement within QANU, internal and external feedback mechanisms need to be applied in a consistent manner.

The review panel concludes that QANU has taken steps towards producing an internal quality assurance manual or policy since 2010. Nevertheless, the review panel would like to encourage QANU, even more, to further strengthen its internal quality assurance processes and procedures, while formalising them in writing. Moreover, and given the fact that QANU is a small organisation, even though working with a representative network of freelance staff, the Agency should pay attention even more to the need of putting processes in place in *one place - a written internal quality assurance manual/policy*. Informal or mainly qualitative approaches, such as external feedback or processes regarding new staff, should become formalised and written and documented processes. In addition, specific measures for working (monitoring) with the network of freelance project managers need to be established.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends applying an internal quality assurance policy, which is to be available on its website.

The review panel recommends considering policies and procedures for systematic feedback from assessment procedures supported by adequate follow-up measures.

The review panel recommends developing specific internal quality approaches regarding the monitoring of QANU's freelance project managers.

The review panel recommends formalising the good practice in place (mentoring, shadowing, collegial feedback and support processes in place) in written documentation.

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.

2010 Review conclusion: formerly ESG 3.8 Accountability Procedures (Guideline) - substantially compliant (see the quoted recommendation above)

Evidence

QANU successfully underwent an ENQA-coordinated external review in 2010. In 2015, the board of QANU confirmed its intention to continue QANU's membership in ENQA and decided to undergo again an ENQA-coordinated review. The review panel learned that some of the recommendations have been implemented, while others have not. Regarding the latter, an explanation is provided in the follow-up report of 2013. The review panel learned that the progress report (2013) was used as a starting point for the relevant SAR.

In addition to the cyclical external reviews by ENQA, the review panel learned, during the site visit, that formalised contact with NVAO are also aiming to support a reflection on policies and activities. This, in return, intends to assure a common understanding of external quality assurance in the light of the ESG. QANU is, like all other quality assurance agencies in the Netherlands, attending these meetings regularly, in which NVAO's discussions with the agencies relates to the actual subjects, external quality assurance system, upcoming changes and topics, and such.

Since 2015, NVAO has introduced bilateral meetings with the agencies. The objective of these bilateral meetings is to have more in-depth discussions with the agencies about the quality of their work and their experiences in collaboration with each other. The representatives of NVAO, during the site visit, emphasized that these bilateral meetings are aiming to guarantee that agencies deliver their work compliant to the standards set (NVAO's frameworks) and with regard to this, the bilateral meetings also promote to work in compliance with the ESG. The review panel learned that, in the near future, NVAO is going to have an even closer monitoring of the work of the agencies. This adjustment of NVAO's monitoring approach should additionally guarantee that agencies are working in compliance with the ESG.

Analysis

The review panel considered evidence demonstrating that the external review of 2010 supporting the reflection on own policies and activities, with some recommendations having been implemented. However, the panel also perceived that, since 2013 (the follow-up report to ENQA) discussions regarding the continuous enhancement of own processes and procedures were obviously not entirely shaded by the revised ESG.

Recommendations

Although the cyclical review is in place, the review panel recommends establishing of effective follow-up processes between reviews, aiming to reinforce critical reflection on own processes and procedures. Ideally, QANU, as a whole, is involved in such discussions (board, managing body - incl. management and project managers).

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.

2010 Review conclusion: ESG 2.1 Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures - fully compliant

Evidence

As of the SAR and emphasized during the site visit, external quality assurance in the Netherlands is based on the principle that higher education institutions themselves are responsible for the quality of their educational activities (*Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, Article 1.18*). Bearing this in mind, the system of external quality assurance assesses whether higher education institutions sufficiently ensure and enhance the quality of educational provisions.

The review panel learned that, on an overall level, ESG Part 1 is reflected by the *main principles underlying the system of quality assurance and the various assessments applied in the Netherlands*.

However, evidence needs to be elaborated in two steps. First, for the assessment of degree programmes (NVAO), and second, for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

As far as **the assessment of degree programmes** is concerned, QANU is conducting the *vast majority* in line with NVAO's *assessment framework for limited programme assessments*. The assessment framework has, as mentioned above, four standards (*intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning environment, assessment, achieved learning outcomes*). Compared with NVAO's *framework for extensive programme assessment* (with eleven standards), the framework for **limited programme assessment** is not *taking internal quality assurance* per se into consideration. The aspects dealing with internal quality assurance (ESG Part 1) are more concisely integrated, especially with respect to the standard 2 *teaching-learning environment*. For institutional quality assessments, a framework with five standards is applied, which subsequently is supposed to be in line with the ESG Part 1.

QANU's SAR indicated that the standards in Part 1 ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions are reflected in the Dutch system of external quality assurance in general. NVAO's assessment frameworks are assumed to comply with Part 1 ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions. For example, ESG 1.1 (Policy for quality assurance) and ESG 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes) are **directly addressed** with the framework for an **institutional assessment**, whereas ESG 1.3 (Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment) is addressed in the assessment for a **limited programme assessment**, via standard 2, and by various standards under the framework for extensive assessment.

ESG 1.4 (Student admission, progression, recognition, certification) issues are covered in the framework for a **limited programme assessment**, under standard 2 and standard 3; as well as under standard 4, standard 5 and standard 10 in the framework for an **extensive programme assessment**. ESG 1.5 (Teaching staff), is under the framework for a **limited programme assessment**, dealt with under standards 2 and standard 6 under the framework for an **extensive programme assessment**.

ESG 1.6 (Learning resources & student support) is considered under standard 2 as far as the framework for a **limited Programme assessment** is concerned, and under standard 3, standard 7 and standard 8 in the framework for an **extensive programme assessment**.

As far as ESG 1.7 (Information management) and 1.8 (Public information) are concerned, it can be stated that both are not addressed directly by any framework. However, the review panel learned that information management and public information serve on one side, as a means to measure whether goals have been reached or whether any improvement is necessary. Thorough public information is not possible if higher education institutions cannot rely on valid and reliable data collected. Therefore, higher education institutions are expected to have a system of internal quality assurance in place. As it is stated in the SAR, external assessments aim at establishing whether such systems monitor and review the quality of degree programmes offered periodically.

ESG 1.9 (On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes) is directly applied only in the framework for **extensive programme assessments** (standard 9 *the programme is evaluated on a regular basis, partly on the basis of assessable targets*).

As for ESG 1.10 (Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis), according to the assessment frameworks, the external quality assurance has to be conducted every six years by an independent expert panel.

Standards for a limited programme assessment	Standards for an extensive programme assessment	Standards for an institutional quality assurance assessment
Intended learning outcomes - <i>The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation; they meet international requirements. (1)</i>	Intended learning outcomes <i>The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation; they meet international requirements. (1)</i>	Vision of the quality of the education provided - <i>The institution has a broadly supported vision of the quality of its education and the development of a quality culture. (1) (ESG 1.1, ESG 1.2)</i>
Teaching-Clearing Environment – <i>The curriculum, staff and programme-specific services and facilities enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. (2) (ESG 1.3, ESG 1.4, ESG 1.5, ESG 1.6)</i>	Curriculum - <i>The orientation of the curriculum assures the development of skills in the field of scientific research and/or the professional practice. (2)</i> <i>The contents of the curriculum enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. (3) (ESG 1.6)</i> <i>The structure of the curriculum encourages study and enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. (4) (ESG 1.4)</i> <i>The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students. (5) ESG 1.4)</i>	Police - <i>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. (2) (ESG 1.1, ESG 1.2)</i>
Assessment - <i>The programme has an adequate assessment system in place. (3) (ESG 1.4)</i>	Staff - <i>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. (6) (ESG 1.5)</i>	Output - <i>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. (3)</i>
Achieved learning outcome - <i>The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. (4)</i>	Services and facilities - <i>The accommodation and the facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the realisation of the curriculum. (7) (ESG 1.6)</i> <i>Tutoring and student information provision bolster students' progress and tie in with the needs of students. (8) (ESG 1.6)</i>	Improvement policy - <i>The institution can demonstrate that it systematically improves the quality of its programmes wherever required. (4)</i>
	Quality assurance - <i>The programme is evaluated on a regular basis, partly on the basis of assessable targets. (9) (ESG 1.9)</i>	Organisation and decision-making structure - <i>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. (5)</i>
	Assessment - <i>The programme has an adequate assessment system in place. (10) (ESG 1.4)</i>	
	Learning outcomes achieved - <i>The programme</i>	

	<i>demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. (11)</i>	
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Alignment: Based upon information from the SAR

The review panel learned that, as far as the **assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes)** is concerned, an answer concerning to what extent the SEP would take the ESG Part 1 into consideration needs to be addressed, differentiated for research units as such and for PhD programmes in particular.

ESG Part 1 is *not completely reflected* in the external quality assurance for research units (incl. PhD programmes). The review panel found that the framework for the assessment of research units (SEP) does not address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance *directly*. The criteria primarily refer to aspects of the quality of the *academic research conducted and not to the quality processes and procedures applied within a research unit*. By implication, the primary aim of the assessment of research units is to reveal and confirm the quality and the relevance of academic research to society, thereby improving this where necessary.

If a research unit is held responsible for PhD programmes, the two further aspects, in addition to the stated above, need to be taken into consideration. Namely, the aspects dealing with the PhD programmes in detail, and the aspects concerning the research integrity.

As far as the PhD programme aspects are concerned, it is possible to reflect on reference with the ESG Part 1. However, when the *assessment of PhD programmes* within the scope of the SEP is concerned, a review panel will, first and foremost, deal with the aspects such as the supervision and the instruction of individual PhD candidates.

As it is stated in the SEP, the relevant subjects include the institutional context of the PhD programmes (ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance; ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes; ESG 1.6 Learning resources & student support; ESG 1.8 Public information), the selection of the admission procedures, the programmes contents and structure and the effectiveness of the programme plans and supervision plans (ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes; ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, certification; ESG 1.7 Information management), quality assurance, guidance of the PhD candidates to the job market, duration, success rate, exit numbers and career prospects (ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; ESG 1.5 Teaching staff; ESG 1.7 Information management; ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes). PhD training programmes are assessed as part of the assessments of the research units they belong to every six years (ESG 1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis).

Analysis

The analysis provided in the SAR and during the site visit demonstrates in interviews with QANU's management, staff members, the NVAO and the competent Ministry that as far as the assessment frameworks provided by NVAO are concerned, ESG Part 1 is reflected in the *system of external quality assurance* in the Netherlands. QANU has adopted the framework provided by NVAO as such.

The review panel found that, when it comes to demonstrating accountability regarding compliance of the processes and procedures with the ESG Part 1, QANU should strive for accountability particularly when it comes to procedures following the SEP. Regarding procedures where QANU is following the NVAO frameworks, it can be assumed by implication that ESG Part 1 is reflected in QANU's work. Nevertheless, the review panel underlines the need to emphasize QANU's own responsibility, besides referring to NVAO's, in assuring compliance with the ESG.

The review panel has learned that NVAO has intensively followed the discussion on revision of ESG in the past years. The review panel learned that in all frameworks of NVAO, the ESG has been taken into consideration. In the current ongoing revision of external quality assurance they stated that the revised ESG serves as a reference point for discussions, which was also underlined by representatives of the competent Ministry. The ESG, like other tools within the EHEA, are thoroughly considered. However, it is not intended, which the review panel also supports, that the ESG are translated one-to-one into the frameworks applied. Notwithstanding the core principles, the underlying the ESG is applied consistently, without doubt.

The same applies to the framework for the assessment of research units (SEP). Still, it does not address the effectiveness of the institutions (represented via the research unit/faculty) and internal quality assurance directly, it does not dismiss the research units'/faculties' responsibility for being accountable delivering good quality research – and, therefore, being accountable to provide sound institutional frameworks. The criteria primarily refer to the aspects of the *quality of the academic research conducted* and not to the (internal) quality processes and procedures applied within a research unit (faculty). Even though the ESG Part 1 does not seem to be completely reflected in the assessment of PhD programmes, it is still possible to conclude that the objectives defined for the assessment of PhD programmes are, to a large extent, in compliance with the requirements, as defined in ESG Part 1.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to provide a clear mapping between ESG Part 1 and the assessment areas defined in the SEP and in addition to perform an independent critical analysis concerning to what extent the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in ESG Part 1 are addressed in frameworks for programme assessment under which the agency is performing its tasks.

Relevant findings should be shared with relevant stakeholders aiming to contribute to further development of external quality assurance in the given context the agency is operating within.

The review panel recommends QANU to take care that panel reports for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD Programmes) and for the programme assessment reflect the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes as of ESG Part 1, where it is relevant and possible.

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.

2010 Review recommendations: QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process of committee members to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair. QANU should provide a core 'baseline' set of briefing/training documents to supplement the information supplied at Installation Meetings. QANU should extend its criteria for the nomination and selection of degree programme assessment committees to include an international member. QANU is asked to provide transparent written guidance to institutions on the recruitment and selection of students that engage in all aspects of the assessment process. It might also look to consider expanding its own Board to include a student representative member. QANU should provide explicit written guidance on the need to triangulate evidence where inconsistencies arise as part of the training/briefing documentation provided to assessment committee members'. QANU should consider extending the length of site visits for complex assessments, involving multiple programmes to ensure sufficient time is provided for evidence collection. (2010, p. 25).

2010 Review Panel conclusion: ESG 2.2 Development of External Quality Assurance Processes - fully compliant; ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose - substantially compliant

Evidence

Initially, it needs to be stated that the review panel is, under this standard, not reflecting on all the recommendations issued in the review of 2010. Whenever it seems to be relevant and where an analysis needs to be given, as to what extent QANU has followed-up with the 2010 recommendations, the review panel will do so.

The review panel was provided with sufficient evidence, during the site visit, that different procedures QANU conducts are following clear aims and objectives. The aims and objectives are laid down in the various frameworks under which QANU is operating.

The review panel found that the respective frameworks have been developed by involvement and agreement with stakeholders. With regard to QANU's role and responsibility in the Dutch external quality assurance scheme, the agency has, according to the review panel, an important role. Being a facilitator of assessment processes, in line with the NVAO's framework or the SEP, QANU is also a stakeholder, when it comes to further improvements and practicalities. In this role, QANU can and should contribute to the design and continuous improvement of the frameworks in place. The review panel learned that QANU was represented with one senior manager in the process of further development of the SEP.

QANU can also actively contribute, as a professional stakeholder amongst others, to the ongoing discussions concerning the changes in the assessment of programmes. The review panel learned that the revision of programmes' assessment aims to even more underline the responsibility of higher education institutions being responsible for the quality of their programmes delivered, but as far as the operational aspects are concerned, it also aims to balance the workload and costs for institutions.

The review panel appreciated the insight delivered by the representatives of the Ministry concerning the ongoing change process in the system of assessment of programmes (the NVAO framework). It was elaborated that the currently discussed changes in the system applied will not affect the current types of assessment in place. It was also stated that, in the future, institutional and programme assessments both will be conducted, aiming even more to be fit for purpose. The stakeholder process was explained to the review panel as being interactive and, therefore, also dynamic.

Analysis

The review panel concludes that the assessment frameworks issued by NVAO take into consideration the relevant legal frameworks as laid down in the *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research*. The SEP has been jointly developed by the competent stakeholders; however, it does not need to follow any legal regulations in the narrow sense. The *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research* does not contain requirements for the assessment of research. Nevertheless, a sound quality of academic research seems to be in the wider interest of a society; with regard to this, the SEP can be considered as fit for purpose.

The review panel learned that QANU is by far conducting the vast majority of all programme assessments in research universities, but also a considerable amount of assessments of research units (incl. PhD programmes). Accordingly, QANU is gaining sufficient experience regarding potentials for revision and further enhancement of procedures. The review panel expects that QANU, once having a sound approach regarding thematic-analysis in place, will be even more adequately contributing to the constant further development of methodologies fit for purpose.

The Ministry explicitly expressed that QANU is seen as a stakeholder with relevant experience in quality assurance management. QANU's experience is needed in discussions aiming to further develop external quality assurance on a system level.

QANU is operating well within its remit and frameworks defined. However, the review panel likes to encourage the Agency to put more efforts and to pursue further being a pro-active stakeholder in the process of (further development) external quality assurance.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on its role in the given context. While, on the one hand, QANU is a stakeholder in the process of external quality assurance, QANU, on the other side, is relying on stakeholders' opinions and feedback itself once its facilitation role is concerned.

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.

2010 Review recommendation: QANU should review its existing guidelines, procedures and training materials to repackage them into a more concise set of guidance materials, thus ensuring its procedures, criteria, processes and the decisions reached, as a result, operate in a transparent and consistent manner. (2010, p. 48).

2010 Review panel conclusion: ESG 2.6 Follow-Up Procedures - fully compliant; ESG 3.7 - External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes - substantially compliant

Evidence

QANU is facilitating and conducting two types of assessment procedures, it follows the steps of implementation, as defined in the assessment frameworks by NVAO as well as in the SEP. Both types of assessment are in line with the expected four steps' implementation scheme:

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

The NVAO framework prescribes that the programme under assessment needs to produce the so-called critical reflection, based upon a self-evaluation process. The assessment includes a site visit at the university. The panel produces a report in which it describes its findings and conclusions.

The review panel learned that QANU has issued, in 2015, an updated version of the guideline *for writing a critical reflection for a limited programme assessment*. An update was necessary because of the revision of NVAO's framework. As it is stated in the guideline, the document is aiming to serve as a manual for degree programmes at research universities that invite QANU to conduct an assessment based on the Assessment framework for *limited programme assessments*. It is underlined that the guideline follows the most recent version of the NVAO's assessment frameworks and, in addition, the requirements laid down in the NVAO's guideline for the assessment of final projects are incorporated. The review panel commends this supportive document for research universities, choosing QANU to facilitate the programme assessment. It is assumed that QANU has issued this guideline based on its experience out of numerous assessments conducted.

As far as the follow-up in these procedures is concerned, the review panel has learned that NVAO takes a decision about the accreditation of a programme based on the conclusion outlined in the panel report. As it is stated in the framework document, if an assessment of an existing programme, following an initial accreditation decision, demonstrates that the programme does not meet all quality aspects, NVAO may decide to renew the existing accreditation or initial accreditation and grant the so-called improvement period with conditions set for renewing accreditation. A renewal of accreditation is only valid for a limited period of time. A decision to grant an improvement period goes into effect on the day it is taken. NVAO is in charge to set conditions when granting an improvement period. The assessment framework regulates in detail the further procedures in this cases. As it is stated in SAR, if an assessment panel 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 organises these additional assessments, if it has also carried out the original assessment and supports the panel (minimum two experts) that conducts them.

The SEP prescribes that research units have to write a self-evaluation report, which needs to be based on a self-evaluation process. This report is the starting point for an assessment. An appointed panel is visiting the research unit. Findings and conclusions by the panel are laid down in the report, which will finally be made publicly available. As far as assessments in line with the SEP are concerned, no further regulations with regard to a follow-up are foreseen. However, the SEP regulated that the board of an institution under assessment determines its own position on the assessment outcomes. In the position document, the institution needs to state what consequences will follow upon the assessment.

Analysis

The review panel found evidence that QANU's various assessment procedures are based on a framework that is reliable and predefined. In addition to this, the review panel is convinced that QANU is clearly implementing the various assessment procedures, along with shared responsibilities; especially, when it comes to interlace with NVAO and also assessment procedures in line with the SEP. As of its remit, QANU does not hold full responsibility for all steps of implementation - follow-up procedures – however, it has turned out in practice that, as far as procedures under the NVAO framework are concerned, QANU, as a rule, organises additional assessments, if QANU has carried out the original assessment and supports the panel (minimum two experts) that conducts them.

Commendation

The review panel commends on the *Guideline for writing a critical reflection for a limited programme assessment* (2015). The document is aiming to support research universities in writing a critical reflection (a self-evaluation document) necessary for the programme assessment. It is assumed that QANU has issued this guideline based on its experience out of numerous assessments conducted.

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).

2010 Review conclusion: ESG 3.7 - External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes - substantially compliant (see the quoted recommendation above)

Evidence

QANU has also been unable to formally implement the panel's recommendation (2010) regarding the selection of panel members, because of the revision of the accreditation system, as briefly stated above. As far as other recommendations have tackled the issues concerning the appointment and recruitment of panel members, QANU has stated that it does not see any responsibility within QANU for the implementation. The review panel learned that QANU did not see any responsibility in processes regarding the nomination and selection process of panel members in order to ensure those related processes are independent, transparent and consistently applied. QANU has expressed in the SAR that, due to the fact the universities have the responsibility to compose assessment panels (as of the given frameworks), it does not guarantee that there are no discussions about the quality of the panels afterwards.

The review panel learned that overall both assessment procedures are conducted as peer reviews.

Assessment panels, assessing the existing programmes in the context of a *limited programme assessment* (as it is the main focus of QANU), are convened by the institutions that constitute together an assessment group. As already mentioned before, the institutions appoint a secretary and, subsequently, present the panel to NVAO for approval. The institutions need to provide data on the expertise and independence of the panel members and the secretary, in a manner stipulated by NVAO. However, an institution can also delegate this task to QANU. The final approval of a panel is always done by NVAO.

As a rule, the panel needs to include a student as well as one member with international experience.

As far as the SEP is concerned, panels assessing the research units (incl. PhD Programmes) are composed of experts familiar with the recent trends and developments. It is stated in the SEP that the board of an institution *is responsible for setting up the procedure to assemble an assessment panel*. The board and the research unit ensure that the panel members' *overall profile matches the research unit's research and societal domains*. *The research unit is asked to nominate a candidate chairperson and candidate members. Before appointing the committee members, the board, once again, submits the final composition of the committee to the research unit. The unit indicates whether it agrees with the board that the committee will be capable of adequately assessing the unit's work in that particular composition*. The panel incorporates solely academic members; no student member is foreseen.

The review panel learned during the site visit about various approaches applied by project managers (permanent and freelance) for briefing of panel members during the kick-off meetings for assessments. This practice was also confirmed by several panel members present during the site visit. The briefings pay attention to the criteria and standards, assessment scales, outlook on the assessment reports and general expectations. The review panel has learned that in the follow-up of the 2010 review, QANU has developed a set of core documentation that is distributed to the panel members in advance to a site visit. As a working method applied, the project manager in charge of a particular assessment is working/discussing along the documents provided during a kick-off meeting. The kick-off meeting explicitly aims at preparing panel members for their task, but it also has more practical aims. Consequently, with changes and amendments of the core documents (e.g. assessment framework from NVAO or the SEP), the preparatory set of documents is updated.

The review panel learned that instead of having a one-size-fits-all training approach, the method applied by QANU always tries to address the needs of the panel for a specific assessment (custom-made contextualised information). The project manager in charge always takes care that the panel is familiar with the relevant assessment framework (NVAO or SEP) and provided with information on relevant formal aspects of the assessment and receives information concerning expectations in line with the role being an expert panel member during and after the site visit. As a prerequisite, the framework of NVAO has foreseen, since 2015, that the panel chair is – equally as the secretary - trained by NVAO. The review panel learned that this has not been the case so far in every assessment. NVAO and agencies agreed that the agencies should be allowed to organise training themselves. The review panel has learned that QANU pays specific attention to the preparation of chairs conducting procedures on QANU's behalf.

Analysis

The review panel concluded that within the given frameworks, QANU has a limited role and responsibility in the selection and appointment of panel members, unless a research university is delegating this task of convening a panel to QANU.

However, as far as these cases are concerned the review panel was missing a clear written guidance concerning the procedural steps. While the SAR did not provide evidence on how QANU is proceeding once a research university is delegating the relevant task (compiling a panel) to QANU, the review panel was able to collect evidence during the site-visit. With regard to this, the review panel encourages QANU to go beyond the prerequisites defined in various frameworks by NVAO or the SEP to increasingly formalise its concrete procedural steps regarding the panel composition.

As QANU has signalled in its SAR that, due to the fact the universities have the responsibility to compose assessment panels, it does not guarantee that there are no discussions about the *quality* of the panels afterwards; the review panel would encourage QANU to entirely reflect its responsibility in between. Especially, if QANU, as of the SAR, considers it as one of their task to provide support aiming at strengthening the consistency of assessments - which in return might reduce, but not eliminate, the complaints about the quality of panels afterwards. With QANU's responsibility in preparation and training of panel members, QANU is holding a strong responsibility within the assessment process, equally important as having the formal authority of appointing panel members. The review panel would welcome the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to explicitly strive in its role, as a stakeholder, for the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in panels in the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes). In addition, the review panel recommends that international experience should also be represented in the assessment panel.

The review panel recommends formalising the process of convening a panel, supported by written documentation and guidance concerning potential causes of conflict of interest.

The review panel recommends intensifying cooperation, concerning the training of panel chairs jointly with NVAO.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgments 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.

2010 Review conclusion: ESG 2.3 Criteria for Decisions - fully compliant; ESG 3.7 External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes - substantially compliant (see the quoted recommendation above)

Evidence

According to its responsibilities, QANU is not formally making decisions, neither on the assessment of programmes (framework NVAO) nor on the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

The criteria for outcomes are included within the various frameworks. In both cases, QANU is hyperlinking to the relevant pages of NVAO and the SEP.

The review panel has learned that QANU is strongly taking responsibility regarding the application of the assessment criteria by assessment panels. Evidence was provided by staff members' oral report on how they organise briefing of panels. A particular focus is given on explanation of the various assessment criteria applied. The review panel has also learned that QANU has (also, even if not formalised by now) a thorough assessment of draft reports in place. Draft reports of assessment, which are produced by QANU's project managers, are assessed by a colleague, who was not involved in the project on the basis of a checklist containing a number of relevant quality criteria. If possible, this assessment takes place before the draft report is sent to the programmes to identify any factual errors. In addition, twice a year, an evaluation of a selection of the assessment reports is made by the Board of QANU. QANU's director makes a selection from the reports outcomes, whereas this report's evaluation is also contributing to the preparation and briefing of panels - which finally may result in a consistent application of assessment criteria.

Based on the panel's report, NVAO needs to be in the position to take an independent decision on whether a programme meets the quality standards or not. Therefore, the panel's report is of vital importance for the assessment decision, with the quality assurance agencies, hence, including QANU as well, and their assessment panels are required to meet the explicit quality standards set by NVAO.

However, the review panel learned that the set of criteria for programme assessments (NVAO) leave much room for interpretation by the assessment panel and that the role of the secretary has become very crucial in filling in the criteria and attaining a clear judgment based on a consensus. Moreover, the effectiveness and quality of the assessment panel, thus, is also dependent on the clear and consistent support provided by the secretary.

As far as the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes) is concerned, QANU's secretaries take care that the panel assess the outcomes along with the scores defined. As for the assessment of PhD programmes, the panel needs to issue a qualitative assessment, which is not expressed by any category. Overall, the SEP does not contain further instructions or specifications for the assessment of a PhD training programme. As it is stated in the SEP, the outcomes of an assessment of a research unit do not have formal consequences. If a panel is critical about a PhD programme and expresses this adequately in the assessment report, it is up to the board of an institution or a research unit to decide on follow-up measures.

Analysis

The review panel was able to confirm that the assessment criteria, the protocols and frameworks are accessible to stakeholders. QANU is hyperlinking to the relevant websites of NVAO and the SEP.

As for the views expressed in the various meetings, QANU has processes in place to guarantee a consistent application of assessment criteria, even though not formally defined in a written document.

The review panel concludes that QANU is not taking final decisions on outcomes of assessments regarding study programme assessment procedures and the assessment of research units/PhD programmes.

However, that review panel is convinced that QANU has a mechanism in place assuring that the assessment panels make sure that NVAO's as well the SEP assessment criteria are consistently applied.

Recommendations

The review panel has no particular recommendations for QANU besides guaranteeing a coherent and consistent use of frameworks under which the agency is operating. QANU has to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding and ensuring a coherent follow-up. Processes in place, aiming to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding, should be formalised in their internal quality assurance manual.

When it comes to study programme assessment this is a matter to be taken up by NVAO in collaboration with the agencies, and regarding the assessment of research units/PhD programmes this is a matter to be taken by the universities leadership.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

2010 Review conclusion: ESG 2.5: Reporting - fully compliant

Evidence

The review panel learned that reporting is one of the core responsibilities of QANU; in particular, the core responsibility lies with panel secretaries (project managers) and the panels. As mentioned above, QANU, in particular, secretaries put a lot of effort towards guaranteeing consistent, well-written and evidence-based reports (e.g. collegial feedback on draft reports; twice a year feedback from the Board, etc.). The review panel was provided with a set of reports during the site-visit.

Assessment reports are published after completion of the assessment process. In the case of programme assessment, reports are published only on the NVAO's website and the research university website. QANU is hyperlinking to the website of NVAO.

In case of assessment of research units' (incl. PhD programmes) institutions, research units are obliged to publish reports about the assessment. In case of the reports on assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes), QANU is also publishing them on its website.

Analysis

QANU has various processes and procedures in place, aiming to provide research universities and decision-makers (NVAO) with good-quality reports. The review panel found QANU's panel reports clear, well-written and concise in its structure. Relevant elements, such as context descriptions,

evidence, analysis, findings and recommendations are covered. As mentioned above, QANU is striving to provide higher education institutions with an added value, as the report (esp. in case of programme assessment) should always aim to support enhancement.

The review panel commends the good quality of reports.

Reports on research and state-of-the-art reports are easily accessible on the website of QANU. For the programme reports, however, which are published on the NVAO website, it is not easy for an external person to navigate through the structure and find a particular report.

The review panel suggests QANU to also publish the reports from the assessment of degree programmes once NVAO has made its final decision. The review panel does not entirely follow QANU's opinion that, because of not being in the position to take a final decision, no added value occurs. As of the review panel, QANU holds a strong responsibility for the quality of the reports, which are the evidence for decisions to be taken. Publication of the reports underlines the important role QANU has in procedures of external quality assurance and it would be in line with the practice applied concerning reports on research reviews and the publication of the so-called state-of-the art reports.

Commendations

The review panel commends the good quality of QANU's assessment reports; it especially commends the internal processes defined with the aim to achieve constant and concise reports.

Recommendations

The review panel suggests QANU to consider publishing the reports themselves and not rely solely on the publication initiative of NVAO.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

2010 Review ESG 2.7: Periodic Review - fully compliant; ESG 3.7 (Guideline) External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes - substantially compliant (see the quoted recommendation above)

Evidence

The review panel learned from the SAR and during the site visit that QANU has a formal procedure in place, in case a degree programme under assessment wants to raise a formal objection against an assessment panel. So far, QANU has never received any formal objections. The procedural steps regarding programme assessments are the following:

- The appeal has to contain a clear and detailed formulation of the objections of the board of the university against the assessment;
- QANU's board investigates whether the appeal refers to a procedural error or a misunderstanding on the side of QANU. If that is the case, QANU will try to correct the error

or clarify the misunderstanding; if the appeal is not related to an error or a misunderstanding on the side of QANU, the board will in principle organise a hearing to give the representatives of the university the opportunity to explain its objection in detail;

- The board of QANU decides whether an appeal is justified and whether it leads to a revision of the panel's report; if the university does not agree with the decision taken by the board of QANU, it has the opportunity to take the matter to court.

The review panel learned, during the meetings with stakeholders from the universities, that the process, as such, is communicated; however, the single steps or the possibility to issue a complaint are not published on the website of QANU.

As far as SEP-based assessment processes are concerned, QANU has no complaint/appeal procedures in place. This was justified with the reason that institutions are the *owners* of the assessments of research units and *that QANU only plays a supporting role*. As stated above an assessment of a research unit (incl. PhD programme) does not lead directly to any formal decisions about the funding or the continuation of these programmes.

Analysis

The review panel assumes QANU to be, in both cases, responsible for professional conduct in the application of procedures – regardless to that, the assessment does not lead to a formal decision. Although the review panel is convinced that QANU is striving for professional conduct, misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about process and/or formal outcomes may arise.

With regard to this, an institution should always be in the position to express dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process carried out. With regard to this, QANU is encouraged to reflect on the complaint and appeal procedure for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

Regardless of whether a complaint and appeal procedure for the assessment of study programmes has been used up to now or not, QANU should guarantee the process, as such, is easily accessible on its website and that it is a constituent part of its internal quality assurance manual or policy.

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on the complaint and appeal procedure for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

The review panel recommends QANU to publish its complaints and appeals procedure concerning the assessment of study programmes on its website.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

CONCLUSIONS

The review panel has no further additional observations to be reported on. However, it likes to emphasize that QANU's self-assessment report was to a large extent very descriptive, lacking critical analysis, evaluation and evidence. As mentioned before, the review panel recommends establishing of effective follow-up processes between the reviews, aiming to reinforce critical reflection on own processes and procedures. Ideally, QANU, as a whole, is involved in such discussions (board, managing body - incl. management and project managers). In addition, an adequate stakeholder involvement should not be neglected.

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 2.3 Implementing Process – fully compliant

The review panel commends on the *Guideline for writing a critical reflection for a limited programme assessment* (2015). The document aims to support research universities in writing a critical reflection (a self-evaluation document) necessary for the programme assessment. It is assumed that QANU has issued this guideline based on its experience out of numerous assessments conducted.

ESG 2.6 Reporting – fully compliant

The review panel commends the good quality of QANU's assessment reports, it especially commends the internal processes defined with the aim to achieve constant and concise reports.

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence provided in the SAR and beyond, based on the appreciated and intensive discussions during the site visit have provided the review panel with proofs that, in the performance of its core functions, QANU is widely in compliance with the ESG. In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, QANU is in compliance with the ESG. The observations, analysis and conclusions of the review panel in this review report should be used by QANU to further enhance and improve quality regarding its core activities, and shall to be considered by ENQA as a basis to decide on the continuation and consolidation of QANU's ENQA membership.

The review panel is of the opinion that the follow-up procedure should be implemented thoroughly and beyond the necessity to submit a progress report to ENQA. The recommendations have been issued in order to further enhance and improve QANU's operations. The follow-up process must be implemented, as outlined in the revised ENQA methodology, for agency reviews.

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE – partially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to fine-tune its mission and to clearly strive for translation of it into its day-to-day operation. The review panel recommends working on an organisational chart, which, as a starting point, could also support visibility of the mission statement within the agency as such.

The review panel recommends using the mission statement in place for further development of strategic planning approaches, including stakeholder opinions in a formalised way.

The review panel recommends considering and expanding its own board to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement in its own governance. QANU should in particular strive for inclusion of

student representative members in its board. In addition, QANU should impact, *as a stakeholder*, the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in the experts' panels in the SEP.

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS – fully compliant

No recommendations

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends reflecting on QANU's governance structure in order to safeguard the organisational independence more thoroughly. The review panel likes to repeat its recommendation regarding expanding QANU's board to a wider stakeholder involvement such as a broader stakeholder inclusion with a student and an employer. These stakeholders in QANU's governance structure would support its acting as independent and autonomous agency.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – partially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to take up a pro-active and formalised role with regard to thematic analysis.

The review panel recommends especially using the experience of project managers gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct the thematic analysis in the narrow sense.

The review panel recommends QANU to intensify exchange of experiences with other stakeholders, such as NVAO, the Ministry and universities, on a systematic basis, in order to further jointly develop the system of external quality assurance.

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends formalising various human resource management approaches into one document.

The review panel recommends using of experience and qualification of QANU's staff in order to deploy competences, skills and knowledge for thematic analysis, participation in European/international projects, workshops etc. relevant for quality assurance.

The review panel recommends developing a cooperative approach regarding the training of secretaries jointly with NVAO.

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends applying an internal quality assurance policy, which is to be available on its website.

The review panel recommends considering policies and procedures for systematic feedback from assessment procedures supported by adequate follow-up measures.

The review panel recommends developing specific internal quality approaches regarding the monitoring of QANU's freelance project managers.

The review panel recommends formalising the good practice in place (mentoring, shadowing, collegial feedback and support processes in place) in written documentation.

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES – fully compliant

Recommendations

Although the cyclical review is in place, the review panel recommends establishing of effective follow-up processes between reviews, aiming to reinforce critical reflection on own processes and procedures. Ideally, QANU, as a whole, is involved in such discussions (board, managing body - incl. management and project managers).

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CONDUCT – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to provide a clear mapping between ESG Part 1 and the assessment areas defined in the SEP and in addition to perform an independent critical analysis concerning to what extent the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in ESG Part 1 are addressed in frameworks for programme assessment under which the agency performs its tasks.

Relevant findings should be shared with relevant stakeholders aiming to contribute to further development of external quality assurance in the given context the agency is operating.

The review panel recommends QANU to take care that panel reports for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD Programmes) and for the programme assessment reflect the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes as of ESG Part 1, where it is relevant and possible.

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE – fully compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on its role in the given context. While, on the one hand, QANU is a stakeholder in the process of external quality assurance, QANU, on the other side, is relying on stakeholders' opinions and feedback itself once its facilitation role is concerned.

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES – fully compliant

No recommendations

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to explicitly strive in its role, as a stakeholder, for the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in panels in the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes). In addition, the review panel recommends that international experience should also be represented in the assessment panel.

The review panel recommends formalising the process of convening a panel, supported by written documentation and guidance concerning potential causes for conflict of interest.

The review panel recommends intensifying cooperation, concerning the training of panel chairs jointly with NVAO.

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES – fully compliant

Recommendations

The review panel has no particular recommendations for QANU besides guaranteeing a coherent and consistent use of frameworks under which the agency is operating. QANU has to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding and ensuring a coherent follow-up. Processes in place, aiming to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding, should be formalised in their internal quality assurance manual.

When it comes to study programme assessment this is a matter to be taken up by NVAO in collaboration with the agencies, while the assessment of research units/PhD programmes is a matter to be taken by the universities leadership.

ESG 2.6 REPORTING – fully compliant

Recommendations

The review panel suggests QANU to consider publishing the reports themselves and not rely solely on the publication initiative of NVAO.

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS – substantially compliant

Recommendations

The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on the complaint and appeal procedure for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).

The review panel recommends QANU to publish its complaints and appeals procedure concerning the assessment of study programmes on its website.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The review panel appreciates QANU's overall good contributions to the external quality assurance, as being a professional facilitator for the assessment of programmes and research units (incl. PhD programmes). However, the review panel recommends QANU to become more pro-active in contributing to further development of external quality assurance in the Netherlands. QANU has not regarded itself as a policy-maker. The review panel found that QANU, as an expert and knowledge-based organisation, needs to actively deploy expertise to the system. The review panel recommends QANU to apply a cooperative approach with other stakeholders.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: 2010 AND 2016: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

ENQA Criterion/ESG	2010 review		2016 review	
	Level of compliance	Recommendation(s)	Level of compliance	Recommendation(s)
ESG 2.1 (FORMERLY ESG 2.1)	Fully		Substantially	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to provide a clear mapping between ESG Part 1 and the assessment areas defined in the SEP and in addition to perform an independent critical analysis concerning to what extent the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in ESG Part 1 are addressed in frameworks for programme assessment under which the agency is performing its tasks.</p> <p>Relevant findings should be shared with relevant stakeholders aiming to contribute to further development of external quality assurance in the given context the agency is operating.</p> <p>The review panel recommends QANU to take care that panel reports for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD Programmes) and for the programme assessment reflect the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes as of ESG Part 1 where it is relevant and possible.</p>

<p>ESG 2.2 (FORMERLY ESG 2.2 AND ESG 2.4)</p>	<p>Substantially</p>	<p>QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process of committee members to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair.</p> <p>QANU should provide a core ‘baseline’ set of briefing/training documents to supplement the information supplied at Installation Meetings.</p> <p>QANU should extend its criteria for the nomination and selection of degree programme assessment committees to include an international member.</p> <p>QANU is asked to provide transparent written guidance to institutions on the recruitment and selection of students that engage in all aspects of the assessment process. It might also look to consider expanding its own Board to include a student representative member.</p> <p>QANU should provide explicit written guidance on the need to triangulate evidence where inconsistencies arise as part of the training/briefing documentation provided to assessment committee members’.</p> <p>QANU should consider extending the length of site visits for complex assessments involving multiple programmers to enable sufficient time is provided for evidence collection.</p>	<p>Fully</p>	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on its role in the given context. While, on the one hand, QANU is a stakeholder in the process of external quality assurance, QANU, on the other side, is relying on stakeholders’ opinions and feedback itself once its facilitation role is concerned.</p>
<p>ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES (FORMERLY</p>	<p>Substantially</p>	<p>QANU should consider extending the length of site visits for complex assessments involving multiple programmers to enable sufficient time is provided</p>	<p>Fully</p>	<p>The review panel has no particular recommendations.</p>

<p>ESG 2.6 AND 3.7)</p>		<p>for evidence collection. (3.7)</p> <p>QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process of committee members to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair. (3.7)</p> <p>QANU should provide a core ‘baseline’ set of briefing/training documents to supplement the information supplied at Installation Meetings.</p> <p>QANU should extend its criteria for the nomination and selection of degree programme assessment committees to include an international member.</p> <p>QANU should provide explicit written guidance on the need to triangulate evidence where inconsistencies arise as part of the training/briefing documentation provided to assessment committee members</p>		
<p>ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS (FORMERLY ESG 3.7)</p>	<p>Substantially</p>	<p>QANU is asked to provide transparent written guidance to institutions on the recruitment and selection of students that engage in all aspects of the assessment process. It might also look to consider expanding its own board to include a student representative member.</p>	<p>Substantially</p>	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to explicitly strive in its role, as a stakeholder, for the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in panels in the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes). In addition, the review panel recommends that international experience should also be represented in the assessment panel.</p> <p>The review panel recommends formalising the process of convening a panel, supported by written documentation and guidance concerning potential causes for conflict of interest.</p>

				The review panel recommends intensifying cooperation, concerning the training of panel chairs jointly with NVAO.
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES (FORMERLY ESG 2.3 AND 3.7)	Fully / substantially (3.7 External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes)	<p>QANU should clarify the procedures employed in the development and monitoring of domain-specific frameworks to ensure they remain at a sufficiently high standard, nationally and internationally.</p> <p>QANU should also ensure that evaluation committees can adequately handle cases of justifiable, valid deviation from domain-specific standards to safeguard innovation and profiling of programmes.</p>	Fully	<p>The review panel has no particular recommendations for QANU besides guaranteeing a coherent and consistent use of frameworks under which the agency is operating. QANU has to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding and ensuring a coherent follow-up. Processes in place, aiming to ensure that assessment panels base their opinions on the same understanding, should be formalised in their internal quality assurance manual.</p> <p>When it comes to study programme assessment this is a matter to be taken up by NVAO in collaboration with the agencies, and regarding the assessment of research units/PhD programmes this is a matter to be taken by the universities leadership.</p>
ESG 2.6 REPORTING (FORMERLY ESG 2.5)	Fully		Fully	<p>The review panel has no particular recommendations.</p> <p>The review panel suggests QANU to consider publishing the reports themselves and not rely solely on the publication initiative of NVAO.</p>
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS (FORMERLY ESG 2.7 AND 3.7 [GUIDELINE])	Fully / substantially (3.7 External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes)		Substantially	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on the complaint and appeal procedure for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).</p> <p>The review panel recommends QANU to publish its complaints and appeals procedure concerning the</p>

				assessment of study programmes on its website.
3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.1, 3.3, AND 3.5)	Substantially / partially (3.5 Mission Statement)	<p>As a matter of urgency, QANU should prepare and publish a definitive mission statement, which is to be published explicitly on QANU website and replicated in the core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports.</p> <p>QANU should embed its definitive mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.</p>	Partially	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to fine-tune its mission and to clearly strive for translation of it into its day-to-day operation. The review panel recommends working on an organisational chart, which, as a starting point, could also support visibility of the mission statement within the agency as such.</p> <p>The review panel recommends using the mission statement in place for further development of strategic planning approaches, including stakeholder opinions in a formalised way.</p> <p>The review panel recommends considering and expanding its own board to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement in its own governance. QANU should in particular strive for inclusion of student representative members in its board. In addition QANU should impact, <i>as a stakeholder</i>, the inclusion of students (PhD candidates) in the experts' panels in the SEP.</p>
3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS (FORMERLY ESG 3.2)	Fully (3.2 Official Status)		Fully	The review panel has no further recommendations.
3.3 INDEPENDENCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.6)	Substantially (3.6 Independence)		Substantially	The review panel recommends reflecting on QANU's governance structure in order to safeguard the organisational independence more thoroughly. The review panel likes to repeat its recommendation regarding expanding QANU's board to a wider stakeholder involvement such as a broader stakeholder inclusion with a student and an employer. These stakeholders in QANU's governance structure would support its acting as independent

				and autonomous agency.
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS (FORMERLY ESG 2.8)	Fully (2.8 System-Wide Analysis)		Partially	<p>The review panel recommends QANU to take up a pro-active and formalised role with regard to the thematic analysis.</p> <p>The review panel recommends especially using the experience of project managers gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct the thematic analysis in the narrow sense.</p> <p>The review panel recommends QANU to intensify exchange of experiences with other stakeholders, such as NVAO, the Ministry and universities, on a systematic basis, in order to further jointly develop the system of external quality assurance.</p>
3.5 RESOURCES (FORMERLY ESG 3.4)	Fully (3.4: Resources)		Substantially	<p>The review panel recommends formalising various human resource management approaches into one document.</p> <p>The review panel recommends using of experience and qualification of QANU's staff in order to deploy competences, skills and knowledge for thematic analysis, participation in European/international projects, workshops etc. relevant for quality assurance.</p> <p>The review panel recommends developing a cooperative approach regarding the training of secretaries jointly with NVAO.</p>
3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT (FORMERLY	Substantially (3.8 Accountability Procedures)	QANU should ensure there are sufficient measures in place, internally, to mitigate against concerns that threshold standards of domain-specific frameworks are being heavily influenced by the sector.	Substantially	<p>The review panel recommends applying an internal quality assurance policy, which is to be available on its website.</p> <p>The review panel recommends considering policies</p>

<p>ESG 3.8)</p>		<p>QANU should review its existing guidelines, procedures and training materials to repackage them into a more concise set of guidance materials thus ensuring its procedures, criteria, processes and the decisions reached, as a result, operate in a consistent manner.</p> <p>QANU should repackage information on its internal quality measures and processes them into a concise Quality Policy to be published on its website.</p> <p>QANU should link its Quality Policy to its annual reporting, strategic and operational planning processes to enhance its capacity to monitor achievement against its mission statement, goals and objectives.</p>		<p>and procedures for systematic feedback from assessment procedures supported by adequate follow-up measures.</p> <p>The review panel recommends developing specific internal quality approaches regarding the monitoring of QANU's freelance project managers.</p> <p>The review panel recommends formalising the good practice in place (mentoring, shadowing, collegial feedback and support processes in place) in written documentation.</p>
<p>3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES (FORMERLY ESG 3.8 [GUIDELINE])</p>	<p>Substantially (3.8 Accountability Procedures)</p>		<p>Fully</p>	<p>Although the cyclical review is in place, the review panel recommends establishing of effective follow-up processes between reviews, aiming to reinforce critical reflection on own processes and procedures. Ideally, QANU, as a whole, is involved in such discussions (board, managing body - incl. management and project managers).</p>

ANNEX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

19 June 2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
16.30 - 19.00	Review panel's kick-off meeting – preparation for the Review (meeting at: NH Hotel meeting room)	N/A	Introduction, the first impressions of SAR, outstanding information requirements, agreement on lead panel members per session and particular lines of questioning	Chair of the panel
19.30	Working Dinner / Preparation for the Review De Rechtbank			

20 June 2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8.30 - 8.45	Transfer from Hotel to QANU office Meeting Hotel Lobby at 8.30			
8.45 - 9.30	Preparation for Panel All meetings - QANU Meeting room			
9.30 - 10.00	Session 1 / Introduction and Welcome & Presentation about the higher education system in the Netherland / History of QANU	Peter van Lieshout (chair QANU board) Sietze Looijenga (director QANU) Meg van Bogaert (deputy director / research coordinator) Linda te Marvelde (education coordinator)	Welcome and practical orientation Higher education in the Netherlands (external quality assurance) in a wider context Future Developments - change in the external quality assurance in the Netherlands	HTJ
10.00 – 10.30	Session 2 / Meeting with staff members who contributed to self-assessment report	Sietze Looijenga (director QANU) Linda te Marvelde (education coordinator) Adrienne Wieldraaijer-Huijzer (project manager)	Process and preparation for ENQA review; internal reflection, external consultation/stakeholder view /	MEW

			accountability	
10.30 - 11.15	Session 3 / Meeting with QANU board	Peter van Lieshout (chair QANU board) Jaap Zwemmer (vice-chairman and treasurer) Guy Aelterman (board member) Gerry Wakker (board member) Paul Ruhlmann (board member) Arie Nieuwenhuizen Kruseman (board member)	Strategic planning; annual planning; scope of operation Consideration of ESG	HTJ
11.15 - 11.30	Break / Discussion among panel members / Preparation for upcoming sessions			
11.30 - 12.15	Session 4 / Meeting with representatives of senior management staff	Sietze Looijenga (director QANU) Meg van Bogaert (deputy director / research coordinator) Linda te Marvelde (education coordinator) Sanderijn de Vries (operational management coordinator)	Assessment methodologies, procedures, Operation task sharing (link to NVAO / SEP) Resources, activities Consideration of ESG	AV
12.15 - 13.15	Lunch Break / including preparation for up-coming sessions			
13.15 - 14.00	Session 5 / Meeting with QANU Project Managers / freelance project Managers and QANU secretariat	Kees-Jan van Klaveren (project manager) Adrienne Wieldraaijer-Huijzer (project manager) Leonie Kuhlmann (project manager) Fiona Schouten (project manager) Marianne van der Weiden (freelance project manager) Mark Delmartino (freelance project manager) Marielle Klerks (freelance project manager) Shanna Willems (QANU secretary)	Assessment methodologies, procedures, Resources, activities	MEW
14.00 - 15.00	Session 6 / Meeting with students involved in QANU procedures	Jeffrey Verhoeff (student member of the panel that assessed the programmes in Biology) Jan-Yme de Boer (student member of the panel that assessed the research master's programme CAST, Cultures of Arts, Science and Technology)	Assessment methodology and criteria, Expert selection and handling conflict of interest, professional conduct, support experts, reporting	SD

		Gerben Yntema (student Biology University of Amsterdam, spoke to the panel during the site visit)	Involvement of students	
15.00 - 15.45	Break / Discussion among panel members / Preparation for upcoming sessions QANU Meeting room			
15.45 - 16.45	Session 7 / Meeting with representatives from the pool of reviewers involved in QANU degree programme assessments	Wim Jochems (chair of the panel that assessed the teacher training programmes) Herman van den Bosch (participated in several assessments) Joos Teixeira de Mattos (member of the panel that assessed programmes in Biology)	Assessment methodology and criteria, Expert selection and handling conflict of interest, professional conduct, support experts, reporting	AV
16.45 - 17.45	Session 8 / Meeting with staff from Universities that have been undertaken recent QANU degree programme assessment	Marie-Jet Fennema (policy advisor of the Board of Utrecht University) Alie van Aragon (policy advisor of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Groningen, former policy advisor of the Board of the same university) Roos Eggers (policy advisor of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Amsterdam) Tom Kuiper (policy advisor at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University) Cathelijne Habets (policy advisor of the Faculty of Arts, Utrecht University)	Assessment methodology and criteria, review experts, Criteria for decision, decision making process, professional conduct, consultancy by agency, feedback, appeal	HTJ
17.45 - 18.45	Panel meeting / closure of the day	N/A		
18.45 - 19.00	Transfer to Hotel	N/A		
19.00	Working Dinner / Reflection of the day / preparation of the 3rd Day			

Brasserie Goeie Louisa

21 June 2016

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8.30 - 8.45	Transfer form Hotel to QANU office Meeting Hotel Lobby			
8.45 - 9.00	Preparation for Panel			
9.00 – 9.45	Session 9 / Meeting with representatives from the Ministry	<p>Irma van den Tillaart (member of the Management Team of the Directorate for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)</p> <p>Dirk Haen (policy advisor, Directorate for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)</p> <p>Sarah Morassi (policy advisor, Directorate for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)</p>	Accountability, external relations, professional conduct	HTJ
9.45 - 10.30	Session 10 / Meeting with staff from Universities that have been undertaken recent QANU assessments of research units	<p>Like Fastenhout-Strating (policy advisor, University of Amsterdam)</p> <p>Corrien Blom (policy advisor, Royal Academy of Sciences - KNAW)</p> <p>Pieter Vreeburg (policy advisor, Erasmus University Rotterdam)</p> <p>Ina Putter (policy advisor, VU University of Amsterdam)</p> <p>Helga Varwijk (policy advisor who contributed to the development of new SEP)</p>	Assessment methodology and criteria, review experts, Criteria for decision, decision making process, professional conduct, consultancy by agency, feedback, appeal	SD

10.30 - 11.00	Break / Discussion among panel members / Preparation for upcoming sessions			
11.00 - 11.45	Session 11 / Meeting with representatives from the pool of reviewers involved in QANU assessments of research units	Niels Noorderhaven (chair of the panel that assessed the research units of the Netherlands Defense Academy) Beate van der Heijden , (chair of the panel that conducted the midterm review of the research units Business Administration of the University of Amsterdam and VU University of Amsterdam)	Assessment methodology and criteria, Expert selection and handling conflict of interest, professional conduct, support experts, reporting	AV
11.45 - 12.30	Session 12 / Meeting with representatives from research Universities	Nellie Harms (director of education, Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences, VU University Amsterdam) Theo Wubbels (former vice-dean of education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University) Henk van der Molen (dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam) Johan Vermeer (former director of education, Faculty of Sciences, VU University Amsterdam)	Accountability, external relations, professional conduct	HTJ
12.30 - 13.00	Lunch Break / Lunch catering			
13.00 - 13.45	Session 13 / Meeting with representatives from research units	Representative from research unit by skype fromform 13:30 to 13:45: Bert van der Zwaan , rector magnificus of Utrecht University	Accountability, external relations, professional conduct	SD
13.45 - 14.30	Session 14 / Meeting with representatives from VSNU	Luut Kroes ('domain leader' Education, VSNU)	Accountability, external relations, professional conduct	MEW
14.30 - 15.00	Break / Discussion among panel members / Preparation for upcoming sessions			
15.00 – 15.45	Session 15 / Meeting with representatives from NVAO	Paul Zevenbergen (member of the Executive Board) Henri Ponds (policy advisor)	Consideration ESG, relation, professional conduct, decision making, follow up	HTJ

15.45 – 16.00	Break / Discussion among panel members / Preparation for upcoming sessions			
16.00 – 16.30	Session 16 / Meeting with director / coordinators to clarify any pending issues	Sietze Looijenga (director QANU) Meg van Bogaert (deputy director / research coordinator) Linda te Marvelde (education coordinator) Sanderijn de Vries (operational management coordinator)	Clarification of open issues	HTJ / all
16.30 – 17.30	Discussion among panel members / closure of the day			
18.30	Dinner among panel members De Veiling			
22 June 2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8.30 – 8.45	Transfer form Hotel to QANU office Meeting Hotel Lobby			
8.45 – 10.00	Panel meeting preparation for the final feedback and debriefing meeting			
10.00 – 10.45	Session 17 / Final de-briefing meeting with QANU staff and management, QANU Board members and chair to inform about preliminary findings	Peter van Lieshout (chair QANU board) Jaap Zwemmer (vice-chairman and treasurer) Guy Aelterman (board member) Gerry Wakker (board member) Paul Ruhlmann (board member) Arie Nieuwenhuizen Kruseman (board member) Sietze Looijenga (director) QANU staff members	Information about preliminary findings and information about the timetable for drafting of the report / decision making by ENQA	HTJ
10.45 – 13.30	Final wrap-up meeting among panel members division of labour Division of labour, detailed timetable and milestones			
13.30 - 14.30	Lunch catering / End of work /Departure of Panel			

ANNEX 3: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

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

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

March 2016

1. Background and Context

QANU is a quality assurance agency that contributes to the further improvement of the quality of scientific education and research in the Netherlands by organizing and coordinating assessments by peers of scientific degree and research programmes on behalf of universities and other institutions and by conducting other activities in the area of quality assurance. QANU also utilizes its expertise and experience in European and international projects and networks within scientific education and research and within other sectors outside scientific education and research.

Elaboration of the mission

QANU conducts activities in the field of external quality assurance in higher education and research, commissioned by universities in the Netherlands: QANU organizes and co-ordinates assessments of degree programmes and research programmes on the basis of formal frameworks established by the relevant authorities. QANU thus contributes to maintaining and further improving the quality of scientific education and research in the Netherlands and has, on the basis of its experience and expertise, a role and a position of its own in the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands.

QANU works with committees of peers, experts in a discipline who are in a position to provide a substantive assessment of a degree programme or a research programme. In QANU's view, the system of external quality assurance aims both at accounting for results obtained and at further improving the quality of programmes. QANU preferably assesses clusters of degree or research programmes. As a result, QANU's assessments make it possible to look at a degree or research programme from a wider perspective and to identify examples of best practices. QANU is an independent organization that fulfils requirements with respect to independence and integrity, both at a national and at a European and international level.

QANU has experience and expertise that is not just useful and relevant for scientific education and research in the Netherlands. QANU aims at using its expertise and experience in European and international projects and networks as well as in other sectors outside scientific education and research.

QANU has been a full member of ENQA since 2005 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

QANU has been registered in EQAR since 2011 and is applying for renewal.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent QANU 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 QANU should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support QANU's application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgments with regard to granting membership.

2.1 Activities of QANU within the scope of the ESG

In order for QANU to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of QANU 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 QANU have to be addressed in the external review:

1. Assessments of degree programmes;

2. Assessments of research programmes. This activity might be within the scope of the ESG as far as it concerns PhD training Programmes and the supervision of PhD candidates. The self-assessment report (SAR) and the external review report (ERR) should thus analyze whether the assessments of research programmes can be considered within the scope of the ESG, in the light of the subject of these assessments and QANU's role in them, and comment on the extent to which they are in compliance with the ESG.

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 QANU including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to QANU;
- 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 QANU 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 QANU review.

3.2 Self-assessment by QANU, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

QANU is responsible for the execution and organization 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 QANU 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

QANU 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 QANU at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

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

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and QANU.

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 QANU within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If QANU 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 QANU, finalise the document and submit it to QANU 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.

QANU is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which QANU 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

QANU 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. QANU 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 QANU. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgment 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 QANU has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed 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 QANU and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by QANU, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. QANU 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

QANU 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, QANU 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 QANU 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	November/December 2015
Appointment of review panel members	January 2016
Self-assessment completed	February/March 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	March 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2016
Briefing of review panel members	May 2016
Review panel site visit	June 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	August 2016
Draft of evaluation report to QANU	September 2016
Statement of QANU to review panel if necessary	September 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA early	October 2016
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of QANU	November 2016
Publication of the report	November / December 2016

ANNEX 4: GLOSSARY

CROHO	Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
EHEA.	European Higher Education Area
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KNAW	Royal Academy of Sciences
NAO	Dutch Accreditation Organisation
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
NWO	Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
QA	Quality Assurance
QANU	Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
VSNU	Board of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands

ANNEX 5. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY QANU

QANU provided prior to the site-visit

- QANU's Self-Assessment Report Version 3 as of May 2016
- QANU - External-review-report-of-ENQA review, as of October 2010
- QANU - ENQA Progress Report as of September 30, 2016
- Assessment frameworks for the higher education accreditation system of the Netherlands, as of 19 December 2014 (NVAO)

The framework document is a comprehensive document regulating all the relevant procedural steps. While the first chapters present the frameworks pertaining to the assessment of institutions and programmes, the following are outlining each of the assessment frameworks in detail: its set-up, the framework itself, the elements of the assessment process and the decisions to be taken by NVAO. In addition, chapters are outlining the background and the criteria that apply to the award of a distinctive feature, the documentation required for the various assessments, etc. One chapter defines the assessment scales that apply to programme assessments and presents examples for the operationalisation of said scales, this chapter is followed by one that encompasses the assessment rules and another that elaborates regulations concerning conditional initial accreditation decisions, conditional decisions on institutional audits and granting improvement periods in an accreditation process. The framework is concluded by a chapter outlining regulations regarding the composition of audit panels for institutional audits and the composition of assessment panels for programme assessments and chapters dealing with frameworks pertaining to extensive initial accreditations, which is a chapter outlining the appeal procedures.

- Standard Evaluation Protocol - Protocol for Research Assessments in the Netherlands 2015-2021, as of 21 March 2014 (VSNU, KNAW, NOW)

Assessment Criteria

Research Quality: *The assessment committee assesses the research unit on the three assessment criteria. It ensures that the qualitative assessment (text) and the quantitative assessment (assigned category 1-4) are in agreement. It is important for the committee to relate these criteria to the research unit's strategic targets. The three criteria are applied with a view to international standards.*

Relevance to Society: *The committee assesses the quality of the unit's research and the contribution that research makes to the body of scientific knowledge. The committee also assesses the scale of the unit's research results (scientific publications, instruments and infrastructure developed by the unit, and other contributions to science).*

In addition to the criteria set out on the left side, every assessment also considers at least two further aspects: PhD programmes and research integrity.

PhD Programmes: *The assessment committee considers the supervision and instruction of PhD candidates. The relevant subjects include the institutional context of the PhD programmes, the selection and admission procedures, the programme content and structure, supervision and the effectiveness of the programme plans and supervision plans, quality assurance, guidance of PhD candidates to the job market, duration, success rate, exit numbers, and career prospects. At the universities, it is the graduate schools that provide PhD supervision and instruction. If the PhD programmes are also run in a nationally accredited research school and the research unit's PhD candidates participate in those schools, then the assessment also covers the quality of the national research school. The national research school is assessed within the context of the research units' SEP assessments. As a rule, this is the research unit that acts as the lead unit for the research school. A similar*

arrangement is made when the PhD candidates of multiple research units are enrolled in a single graduate school. The research unit undergoing assessment responds to a number of questions in the self-assessment, described in the format provided in Appendix D. The unit should use these questions to reflect on its own PhD programmes and on how it supervises PhD candidates within its research unit. The assessment committee discusses this during the site visit, comments on this in its report, and makes recommendations for improvement. Where research units cooperate within the context of a graduate school or accredited research school, they will preferably present their PhD programmes collectively and in the same way. Where necessary, a separate external committee can be called in to assess a national/inter-university research school.

Viability: The committee assesses the strategy that the research unit intends to pursue in the years ahead and the extent to which it is capable of meeting its targets in research and society during this period. It also considers the governance and leadership skills of the research unit's management.

Research integrity: The assessment committee considers the research unit's policy on research integrity and the way in which violations of such integrity are prevented. It is interested in how the unit deals with research data, data management and integrity, and in the extent to which an independent and critical pursuit of science is made possible within the unit. The assessment committee bases its assessment on how the research unit itself describes its internal research culture. The research unit undergoing assessment responds to a number of questions in the self-assessment, described in the format provided in Appendix D. The unit should use these questions to reflect on its own data management practices, the level of internal research integrity, and the transparency of its research culture. The assessment committee discusses these points during the site visit, comments on this in its report, and makes recommendations for improvement.

- Guideline for writing a critical reflection for a limited programme assessment, as of September 2015 (QANU)
- Flow chart of degree programme assessment
- Flow chart of research assessment

QANU documents provided during the site-visit

- QANU organigram (the first draft version as of the site visit)
- QANU Quick Reference Guide (21 November 2013)
- Algemene voorwaarden voor dienstverlening door QANU (1 March 2011)
- Algemene uitgangspunten onderwijsbeoordelingen QANU (March 2015)
- Algemene uitgangspunten onderzoeksbeoordelingen QANU (March 2015)

Degree programme assessments

- Agenda of the site visit preparatory meeting
- QANU checklist for limited programme assessment (2015)
- Schrijfwijzer QANU-rapport

Research reviews

- Preliminary assessment form (research reviews)
- Power Point presentation: Research Review in the Netherlands, Context and Procedures (2015)
- Appendix C Statement of impartiality and confidentiality (Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021)

QANU reports

Programme assessments

- Universitaire Lerarenopleidingen (cluster), Universiteit Leiden/ICLON (2014)
- Bachelor's programme European Studies (additional assessment), Maastricht University/Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (2015)
- Research master's programme in Methodology and Statistics for the Behavioural, Biomedical, and Social Sciences, Utrecht University/Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (2016)
- Biologie (cluster), Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen/Faculteit der Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Informatica (2016)
- Bachelor's programme Biologie, Universiteit Utrecht/Faculteit Bètawetenschappen (2016)
- Master's programme Biological Sciences, Utrecht University/Faculty of Science (2016)
- Master's programmes Biology and Medical Biology, Radboud University Nijmegen/Faculty of Science (2016)
- Master's programmes Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation, University of Twente/Faculty of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (2015)

Research Reviews

- Economics and Business 2008-2014 (2016)
- Mathematics 2009-2014 (2016)

Other reports

- State of the art -Report: Universitaire Lerarenopleidingen in Nederland, Op het snijvlak van academie en professie (October 2015)
- State of the art -Report: Artificial Intelligence: academic programmes in the Netherlands (2015)
- Performance Review, Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies 2010-2014 (2015)

NVAO documents

- Guidelines for the assessment of final projects during external assessments (18 February 2015)
- Code of conduct (appendix of NVAO Guideline for requirements regarding panel composition, 11 October 2015)
- Formulier onafhankelijkheid en geheimhouding voorafgaand aan het beoordelingsproces (appendix of NVAO Guideline for requirements regarding panel composition, 11 October 2015)



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) undertaken in 2016.



2016 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW