

Self-assessment Report for the focused review of QANU

with a follow-up on the ENQA Agency Review in 2016



QANU contributes to the further improvement of the quality of scientific education and research in the Netherlands by organising 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 utilises 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.

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Preface

QANU's Board firmly believes that QANU's assessments should be expected to comply with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The ESG constitute the foundation for the system of external quality assurance in higher education in the Netherlands. This can only imply that every component of the system, including the quality assurance agencies and the working methods they adopt for their assessments, should also comply with the ESG. The Board's policy is therefore that QANU, as a sign of its compliance with the ESG, should be a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and should be included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

QANU is a quality assurance agency that operates in a solid tradition that dates back to the 1980's. Since its establishment in 2004, QANU conducted by far the most of the assessments of degree programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands. Over the years, the systems and structures and the relations between stakeholders contributing to the external quality assurance have undergone a lot of changes. QANU has always been able to adapt to changes and to maintain and further strengthen its reputation of a thorough and reliable agency that operates in accordance with the relevant quality standards. In recent years, for instance, QANU invested a lot in developing a more customer-friendly approach, in essence because QANU became even more strongly convinced that maintaining good relations with universities are of crucial importance for QANU's position as a quality assurance agency.

The Review Panel that assessed QANU in 2016 concluded that QANU complies substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines and phrased a series of recommendations that are aimed at a further improvement of QANU's activities. ENQA's Board decided to renew QANU's membership of ENQA in November 2016 on the basis of the Review Panel's final report.

QANU's Board was surprised to learn that EQAR's Register Committee rejected QANU's application for a renewal of its registration in the Register. The Board decided to accept EQAR's conclusion and has taken several measures to address the reasons for rejection laid down by EQAR's Register Committee.

The Board feels that QANU has succeeded to implement a series of measures to meet the criticism expressed by EQAR's Register Committee. The Board also feels that these measures contribute to the further improvement of the quality of the assessments QANU conducts.

The Board has noted that QANU's staff has significantly contributed to a serious impulse for the quality of QANU's assessments. This impulse is partly the result of the outcomes of the assessment in 2016, partly brought about by the reflection sessions in 2017 (cf. QANU's response to the first recommendation for ESG 3.1), and partly caused by personnel changes: in the last two years, four of QANU's more experienced project managers (including two coordinators) decided to resign. Their successors took up their jobs with focus, energy and enthusiasm. The staff as a whole thus created a kind of revitalisation of the organisation and a further strengthening of the quality culture.

The Board appreciates it very much that ENQA and EQAR agreed with QANU's proposal to combine the follow-up report for ENQA and the focused review for EQAR. The Board is convinced that this document provides a good and insightful overview of recent developments and that it shows that QANU achieved quite a lot in two years' time.

The Board is grateful to QANU's staff members for all their efforts and feels that the staff can be proud of what they have been able to achieve since the assessment in June 2016.

Peter van Lieshout
Chairman of the Board

Sietze Looijenga
director

Introduction

On 19–22 June 2016, Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) was assessed by an international review panel composed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and chaired by Professor Henrik Toft Jensen (Roskilde Universitet, DK). The main aim of this assessment was to determine whether QANU operates in compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG). The report to be produced by the review panel was aimed at determining whether QANU meets the criteria for full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In addition, the report was also aimed at serving as a basis for a renewed registration in the Register, maintained by EQAR.

On 30 November 2016, ENQA's Board decided to reconfirm QANU's membership of ENQA for another period of five years on the basis of the final report of the ENQA review panel. ENQA's Board noted that the review panel had phrased several recommendations to further improve QANU's activities as a quality assurance agency. ENQA's Board invited QANU to prepare a follow-up report on the implementation of the review panel's recommendations and to submit this report to the ENQA Board within two years of the Board's decision to reconfirm QANU's membership (i.e., before the end of November 2018).

On 29 June 2017, EQAR informed QANU that EQAR's Register Committee was unable to fully concur with the conclusions of the ENQA review panel and thus also unable to decide that QANU qualified for a renewal of its inclusion on the Register. The Register Committee invited QANU to submit an additional representation in response to the Register Committee's deferral of QANU's application for a renewal of its inclusion on EQAR.

On 27 September 2017, QANU submitted this additional representation to EQAR's Register Committee. The additional representation still did not convince the Register Committee that QANU qualified for a renewal of its inclusion in the Register. On 16 November 2017, the Register Committee decided to reject QANU's application. The Register Committee pointed out that QANU had the right to appeal against this rejection.

On 17 February 2018, QANU submitted an appeal to the Register Committee's decision to EQAR's Appeals Committee. On 11 May 2018, the Appeals Committee decided to reject QANU's appeal, thereby confirming the Register Committee's decision to reject QANU's application.

Among the attachments to this report¹ are the documents referred to in the preceding paragraphs:

- QANU's Self-Assessment Report for the assessment by the ENQA review panel, dated May 2016 (Appendix A);
- the ENQA review panel's Final Report (Appendix B);
- the letter from the chair of ENQA's Board reconfirming QANU's membership of ENQA, dated 14 December 2016 (Appendix C);
- the letter from EQAR's Register Committee inviting QANU to submit an additional representation, accompanying the deferral of QANU's application by the Register Committee, dated 29 June 2017 (Appendix D);
- the deferral of QANU's application by the Register Committee, dated 20 June 2017 (Appendix E);
- the letter from QANU to EQAR's Register Committee, offering QANU's additional representation, dated 27 September 2017 (Appendix F);

¹ There are two sets of documents attached to this report: the documents that are relevant from the perspective of the process of QANU's assessment, starting with the Self-Assessment prepared by QANU in preparation of its assessment in June 2016 and ending with the rejection of QANU's appeal by EQAR's Appeals Committee ('numbered' A – L), and the documents referred to in the description of the measures we have taken as a response to the review panel's recommendations and the Register Committee's observations and conclusions (numbered 1 – x).

- QANU's Additional Representation relating to QANU's application for inclusion on the Register, also dated 27 September 2017 (Appendix G);
- the Register Committee's decision to reject QANU's application, dated 22 November 2017 (Appendix H);
- the letter from EQAR's Register Committee, informing QANU that the application had been rejected, dated 23 November 2017 (Appendix I);
- the letter from QANU to EQAR's Appeals Committee, offering QANU's appeal against the decision by the Register Committee to reject QANU's application, dated 17 February 2018 (Appendix J);
- QANU's appeal to the rejection by the Register Committee, submitted to EQAR's Appeals Committee on 17 February 2018 (Appendix K);
- the letter from EQAR's Appeals Committee, informing QANU that its appeal against the decision of the Register Committee had been rejected, dated, erroneously, 17 November 2017, received by email on 31 May 2018 (Appendix L);
- the Appeals Committee's rejection of QANU's appeal against the decision of the Register Committee, dated 11 May 2018 (Appendix M).

On 20 June 2018, QANU's Board discussed the situation that had arisen after the Appeals Committee's rejection of QANU's Appeal, as a result of which the Register Committee's decision to reject QANU's application for inclusion on the Register had become final. It decided that QANU should apply for a focused review, an option explicitly allowed by EQAR, enabling QANU to once more apply for inclusion on the Register on the basis of a partial or focused review assessing only the standards that were assessed as 'partially compliant' by EQAR's Register Committee. According to EQAR's rules and regulations, the deadline for submitting a new application on the basis of a focused review is 18 months after the Register Committee's original decision. In QANU's case, the deadline is therefore 22 May 2019. Shortly after the board meeting, Sietze Looijenga, QANU's director, informed Colin Tück, the director of EQAR, about the board decision.

On 24 August 2018, Sietze Looijenga met with Colin Tück and Melinda Szabo, policy analyst, in the EQAR Office in Brussels to discuss the organisation and the preparations of the focused review. On 30 August, Colin Tück, Goran Dakovic, ENQA's Reviews Manager, and Sietze Looijenga held a conference call to further discuss the details of the focused review. ENQA kindly agreed to organise and coordinate the focused review.

One of the issues that was discussed in these preparatory meetings was whether QANU could prepare a document that served two purposes: first of all, QANU's obligation to prepare a progress report for ENQA's Board on the implementation of the recommendations by the ENQA review panel, and second, a self-assessment report that could serve as a starting point for the focused review. ENQA and EQAR agreed that QANU should be allowed to prepare such a dual purpose document, provided that the document made clear which parts of the report were primarily aimed at the first purpose (providing information to ENQA's Board about the implementation of the recommendations of the ENQA review panel) and which ones were first and foremost prepared for the review panel that would conduct the focused review (providing evidence that QANU fulfils the criteria for inclusion on the Register).

This document serves the two purposes mentioned above. Its structure is as follows.

- The first part of this report is a self-evaluation report for the focused review of QANU. It contains chapters on recent developments in the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands, on changes in the internal organisation of QANU since 2016 and on the measures QANU took as a response to the conclusions of EQAR's Register Committee. This part is especially aimed at the review panel that will conduct the focused review.
- The second part focuses on the follow-up of the recommendations of ENQA's Review Panel. We address the review panel's recommendations one by one. We describe the measures we have taken to meet these recommendations. This part is specifically aimed at ENQA's Board.

Part I: Self-assessment Report for the focused review of QANU

1. The system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands: brief overview and developments since 2016

1.1. Assessments of degree programmes in higher education

In 2002, the Dutch Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research was amended to include accreditation.² In the amended Act, accreditation is described as a quality mark which expresses that the quality of a degree programme has been assessed positively. Accreditation is a condition for receiving public funding and for the right to award legally recognised degrees.

The amendment of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research led to the establishment of the NVAO, the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (in Dutch: Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie), which received the legal power to award accreditation to programmes which fulfil the conditions laid down in the amended Act. The NVAO is, among other things, responsible for the development of assessment frameworks that serve as the starting point for assessments in the Netherlands and Flanders.

The Dutch system of external quality assurance can be characterized as a two-tier system. The NVAO decides whether an existing degree programme is re-accredited, but it does not assess existing degree programmes itself. The assessments are conducted by quality assurance agencies, at the request of institutions of higher education. QANU is one of these quality assurance agencies.

The external quality assurance system was revised several times since 2002, following amendments of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research.³ The most important change incurred by the first revision, in 2011, was the introduction of the institutional quality assurance assessment. If an institution applies for and passes this assessment, its degree 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. Institutional quality assurance assessments are conducted exclusively by the NVAO.

Since 2011, institutions of higher education are no longer obliged to involve a quality assurance agency for the assessments of their degree programmes. In practice, institutions of higher education still commission quality assurance agencies such as QANU to conduct the assessments of their degree programmes.

In 2015, another amendment of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research led to a revised version of the NVAO's frameworks for assessments of existing degree programmes. The most important changes in the assessment frameworks were the introduction of assessment groups and the division of a single standard on assessment and acquired learning outcomes into two separate standards, one concerning (the system of) assessment, the other concerning acquired learning outcomes.

In addition to the revisions described above, the frameworks underwent other revisions to reduce the perceived administrative burden. The amount of standards in the framework for extensive programme assessment was reduced from 16 to 11. The maximum number of pages to be used for a critical reflection (a self-assessment report) was reduced, from 25 to 15 for programmes undergoing a limited assessment and from 40 to 20 for programmes undergoing an extensive

² We refer to our Self-evaluation report from 2016 (Appendix A) for a description of the system of higher education in the Netherlands and for a more detailed description of the system of external quality assurance.

³ In Dutch: Wet op het Hoger Onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, abbreviated as WHW.

assessment. The required documentation to be provided, including quantitative data relating to success rates, was reduced as well.

On 16 November 2016, the Minister formally approved another new version of the NVAO's assessment frameworks.⁴ The frameworks took effect as of 1 January 2017. The main aim of the development of these frameworks was to ensure that assessments would become simpler and more consistent. The main changes in the new frameworks in comparison to the old ones were:

- The formulation of the standards has been revised in a number of respects, as a result of which the standards are more in line with the European Standards and Guidelines. The additional information for Standard 2, for instance, now refers explicitly to student-centred learning. The standards do not refer to the Board of Examiners any longer.
- The decision rules a panel uses for its assessment of a programme as a whole have been rewritten.
- The requirements for a self-evaluation report are formulated more loosely. A cluster of programmes can make further agreements with a panel about form and size of the self-evaluation report. This report contains a contribution from students.
- The site visit consists of two parts. The second part is a development dialogue between programme and panel.
- An assessment results in two reports: a report on the basis of which the NVAO can take a decision about the re-accreditation of the programme and a report which contains the conclusions of the development dialogue (and which will not be sent to the NVAO).

The NVAO stated that the revised framework took ideas and wishes of institutions as its starting point. Institutions were very much in favour of additional opportunities for using their own interpretation of the standards in the framework and, especially, of a reduction of the administrative burden. It became clear fairly soon that this underlying aim would not be realised. Institutions, programmes and agencies perceived the framework as unclear and too loose. The NVAO's decision to allow for space for programmes preparing their assessment, writing their self-evaluation report and organising the programme of their site visit turned out to be not in line with programmes' wish to know as well as possible what was expected of them in advance of a site visit and which requirements they would have to fulfil in order to qualify for re-accreditation. In addition, there is a tension between the space for individual programmes and the obligation to assess programmes in clusters.

On 21 February 2017, the Minister sent a proposal to conduct a pilot with institutional accreditation and a lighter accreditation at programme level to Parliament. The core of the proposal is that institutions that are selected to participate in the pilot receive institutional accreditation by law. The programmes participating in the pilot are assessed and accredited in a lighter, more restricted way: the NVAO only assesses standards 1 (intended learning outcomes) and 4 (realised learning outcomes) from the framework for restricted programme assessments. Institutions are themselves responsible for the assessment of standards 2 (learning and teaching environment) and 3 (assessment). By now, the pilot has started, with three participating institutions, all of them universities of applied science. The pilot runs until 2024.

In early 2017, the Inspectorate of Education started an investigation of the functioning of the accreditation system in higher education in the Netherlands. This investigation focused on the NVAO's frameworks that were introduced in 2014. In December 2017, the Inspectorate presented an intermediate report, dealing primarily with assessment and accreditation of existing degree programmes.

The Inspectorate's most important conclusions are:

⁴ This version of the NVAO's assessment frameworks, which is, at the time of writing, still the official one, is attached as Appendix 2a.

- the accreditation system guarantees the quality of degree programmes sufficiently and it stimulates programmes to bring about improvements.
- it is inherent in a system of peer review that the reliability of assessments is difficult to establish. Assessment panels and the NVAO can be assumed to be able to distinguish between 'unsatisfactory' and 'satisfactory', but it is much more difficult to distinguish between 'satisfactory', 'good' and 'excellent'. The doubts related to the reliability of these qualifications threaten the societal support for the system of accreditation.
- most degree programmes experience the process of assessment and accreditation as stimulating, in particular the preparations for the site visit and the discussions with the members of the panel. Peer review has a strong support within higher education. The qualifications 'good' and 'excellent' may hinder the open character of the system in general and the discussions with peers in particular.
- the preparations for the site visit are generally perceived as stimulating, but also as quite demanding. The administrative burden is felt to be too high. There seems to be a relation between administrative burden and ownership: the administrative burden is felt to be less high when the ownership of staff and students is strong and the quality culture is further developed.
- the independence of panels may be under pressure as a result of the tension brought about by the competition between quality assurance agencies. There may be conflicting interests, for instance when an agency provides the chair of a panel or when the agency that provides the panel's secretary conducts consultancy work for the same institution as well.
- quality assurance: the quality assurance of the system as a whole is still unsatisfactory. This is due to the lack of clarity in the division of responsibilities and the authorisations of the minister, the NVAO and the Inspectorate. Since the Inspectorate's previous investigation in 2013, the NVAO has not taken enough additional measures to evaluate the reliability of the assessments in a systematic way. The NVAO lacks the authorisation to request documents from agencies (for instance, elaborations or operationalisations of the assessment frameworks) and to make adjustments if necessary.

These conclusions led to recommendations, aimed at the Ministry, the NVAO, the agencies and the degree programmes. Most of these recommendations were included in the bill *Accreditatie op Maat* (see below).

On 12 June 2017, the Minister sent the bill *Accreditatie op Maat* (Custom-made accreditation) to Parliament. The bill, another proposal to amend the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, contains elaborations of issues that were discussed extensively in the past few years, for instance that accreditation does not expire automatically after six years, that the phrase 'recovery period' will be replaced by 'conditional accreditation' and that the distinction between accountability and improvement becomes more explicit. QANU took the opportunity to respond to the bill in writing. In a letter to the Education Committee of the House of Representatives, QANU argued for the replacement of differentiated assessments (unsatisfactory – satisfactory – good – excellent) by binary assessments (complies – does not comply), for a more even and balanced distribution of assessments over the years and for a structured and systematic assessment of quality assurance agencies, preferably on the basis of the European Standards and Guidelines.

The House of Representatives discussed the bill *Accreditatie op Maat* on 6 February 2018. The recommendations based on the Inspectorate's Report on the functioning of the accreditation system in higher education were included in this debate. The House agreed on a series of amendments of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research.

- the position of the secretary of a panel (and, in particular, the required independence) is now explicitly laid down in the Act; this is in line with current practice, so it will have no practical consequences;
- the training of secretaries is also laid down in the Act explicitly; again, this is in line with current practice, so it will have no practical consequences; the additional explanation refers to a certificate that secretaries should acquire;

- the differentiated assessments (unsatisfactory – satisfactory – good – excellent) will be replaced by binary assessments (complies – does not comply);
- programmes that choose to adopt another teaching language than Dutch are expected to explain why they made this choice and how they ensure that their teachers have a sufficient mastery of the language used for teaching.

The bill *Accreditatie op Maat* has been approved both by the House of Representatives and by the Senate shortly before the summer of 2018. Since then, the NVAO has been working on the revision of its assessment frameworks. The draft version of these new frameworks has been available since October 2018. The Ministry and the NVAO still assume that the new frameworks will take effect as of 1 February 2019.

1.2. Assessments of research units

The starting point for assessments of research units is a protocol developed by VSNU (the Association of Universities in the Netherlands), KNAW (the Royal Academy of Sciences) and NWO (the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research).⁵ The Standard Evaluation Protocol is also used to assess the research conducted within institutes that are part of or linked to KNAW or NWO. It has been revised a couple of times since its introduction. The current (fifth) version is valid from 2015 until 2021. At the moment, the evaluation of the current version has started.⁶

The primary aim of assessments based on the Standard Evaluation Protocol is “to reveal and confirm the quality and the relevance of the research to society and to improve these where necessary” (p. 5). The object of assessment is a ‘research unit’. A research unit may be a research group, a research institute, a research cluster or all the research carried out within a faculty. An assessment committee assesses the research unit on three assessment criteria: research quality, relevance to society and viability. In addition to these criteria, an assessment takes at least two further aspects into consideration: PhD training programmes offered by the research unit and research integrity. The committee assesses the first three criteria as ‘excellent’, ‘very good’, ‘good’ or ‘unsatisfactory’. It assesses the additional aspects in a qualitative way only.

According to the Standard Evaluation Protocol, an assessment committee considers the institutional context of the PhD training programmes, the selection and admission procedures, the programme content and structure, the 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.

The main aim for a PhD candidate is to finalise a PhD thesis. Completing a PhD training programme is not an aim in itself, it is a means to achieve the main aim. PhD training programmes are geared towards the needs of individual PhD candidates, who make a selection from a range of more general courses (for example, courses on professional effectiveness, academic presentations, career orientation and application, or presentational skills) and content-related courses offered either by the research unit to which the PhD candidate belongs or another research institute or school. The size of a typical PhD training programme will amount to approximately 30 EC, spread over a period of four years. If a PhD candidate has a contract for three years, the size of the training programme will be less. PhD candidates receive a certificate together with their PhD degree when they have successfully completed their PhD training programme.

⁵ We refer to our Self-evaluation report from 2016 (Appendix A) for a more detailed description of the system of external quality assurance for research units.

⁶ The current version of the Standard Evaluation Protocol is attached as Appendix 2c.

2. Changes in QANU's internal organisation since 2016

2.1. Composition of the Board

Compared to June 2016, when QANU's assessment by the ENQA Review Panel led by Professor Henrik Toft Jensen took place, QANU's Board underwent one change: as of 1 January 2019, QANU's Board will be extended with a seventh member, a representative of students, nominated by LSVB and ISO, the main student organisations in the Netherlands: Josephine Verstappen. Most of the Board members were appointed for a third and final term of office. This means that the current Board members will start looking for their successors in the near future.

2.2. Composition of the staff

Over the last two and a half years, the composition of QANU's staff changed significantly. Late 2016 and early 2017, two of QANU's most experienced project managers, who also served as coordinator (of assessments of degree programmes and assessments of research units), decided to resign, because they wanted to broaden their horizons and they wanted to focus more on the contents of their work and less on administrative and management issues. At the moment, both of them still work for QANU as freelance secretaries. Two other project managers with substantial experience also decided to leave QANU, one of them to pursue his long-time dream and move to Sweden with his family, the other one to take a next step in her career. This description shows that it was very much a coincidence that these project managers decided to leave at more or less the same time.

Since 2016, QANU has been able to attract four seven project managers who seem to be very well suited for their work. Their ages, experience and background differ, which has a positive effect on the diversity of the organisation as a whole.

In the course of 2017, QANU's director decided, as an experiment, to divide the tasks of the previous coordinator of assessments of degree programmes over two project managers. One of these project managers is at the moment involved in the planning of assessments (together with QANU's director and the new coordinator of assessments of research units) and in producing, maintaining and updating important internal documents (such as the Guideline for producing a self-evaluation report). The other project manager is mainly charged with HR-related issues, for instance with developing and maintaining the introductory programme for new staff member, with the supervision of new staff members and with application procedures.

In the autumn of 2016, QANU's director decided to appoint a first project assistant. Project assistants have the task to support project managers. For instance, they ensure that the review panels for the assessments of degree programmes are composed: they approach the candidates proposed by the programmes, make practical arrangements, ensure that the composition of the panel is approved by the NVAO, et cetera. The project assistants (at the moment there are three of them) have turned out to be a very useful addition to the organisation who take a lot of work away from the project managers.

In the course of 2018, QANU's director appointed an operational assistant to strengthen QANU's operational management. Due to the introduction of a new electronic working environment, the large number of projects acquired by QANU and new administrative requirements (for instance, as a result of the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation), the available capacity was, at least for the time being, insufficient.

Another development worth mentioning is that QANU's staff took the initiative to establish a new *personeelsvertegenwoordiging*, a Works Council for small organisations with less than 35 employees.

3. QANU’s response to EQAR’s assessment of QANU’s application for a renewed inclusion on the Register

3.1. Introduction

The primary aim of the focused review is that QANU will once more be included on the Register. To that end, QANU hereby describes which measures it has taken in response to the rejection of QANU’s application for the renewal of its inclusion on the Register and which results these measures have already had.

The Register Committee’s assessment of the relevant standards differs in a few cases from that of the review panel. The table below shows the conclusions of the review panel’s assessment and the Register Committee’s assessment.⁷

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.2	Full compliance	Compliance
2.3	Full compliance	Compliance
2.4	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
2.5	Full compliance	Compliance
2.6	Full compliance	Compliance
2.7	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.1	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.2	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Full compliance	Compliance
3.4	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.5	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.6	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

In its decision, the Register Committee concludes that “QANU only achieved partial compliance with a number of standards. QANU thus fails to meet some key requirements of the ESG and, in its holistic judgement on the basis of the documentation available and QANU’s representation, the Register Committee remained unable to conclude that QANU complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.”

EQAR’s Appeals Committee invited the Register Committee to respond to QANU’s appeal to the rejection of QANU’s application. In its response, which is included in the Appeals Committee’s rejection of QANU’s appeal, the Register Committee repeats its reasons to reject the application:

- the expert panels involved in the case of assessments of research units/PhD training programmes do not include students (as per requirements of ESG 2.4);
- the concerns related to the complaints (in the case of research units/PhD training programmes) and appeals (in the case of assessment of degree programmes) and their handling by the Board of QANU (ESG 2.7);
- the lack of stakeholder involvement in the governance of QANU (ESG 3.1);
- the lack of a systematic approach towards producing thematic analysis (ESG 3.4).

⁷ It should be noted that ENQA uses the notions of partial, substantial and full compliance, while EQAR restricts itself to the notions of partial compliance and compliance, which makes it a bit difficult to compare the two columns with conclusions in the table.

Initially, the Register Committee also had doubts as to whether QANU complied with Standard 3.6. In the deferral of QANU's application, the Register Committee referred to "the lack of a formalised and integrated approach of internal quality assurance". In this case, The Register Committee was apparently convinced by QANU's additional representation and assessed this standard as compliant in its decision. Because the Register Committee was critical about Standard 3.6, we also repeat the measures we have taken relating to this particular standard.

3.2. ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

The Register Committee established that QANU has not met one requirement of the standard, namely including a student member in the assessment of research units/PhD training programmes.

QANU's response:

- As of early 2019, expert panels conducting an assessment of a research unit offering a PhD programme will involve a student member.
- This important change in the composition of panels assessing a PhD programme is the result of an agreement in September 2018 between the presidents of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the institutions that are jointly responsible for the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP), the framework that serves as a starting point for assessments of research units. The three presidents discussed the issue of a student member because they had received a letter from EQAR, pointing out to them that the current version of the SEP is in violation of the European Standards and Guidelines: the SEP does not require a student member for the assessment of PhD programmes, which are third cycle programmes in terms of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, while the ESG prescribe that a panel assessing a third cycle programme should have a student member.
- The presidents of the institutions responsible for the Standard Evaluation Protocol agreed to start a pilot to include a PhD student in such panels with almost immediate effect, i.e., as of the beginning of 2019. The current version of the SEP is valid until 2021. In the preparations for the new version of the SEP, the institutions will evaluate the pilot and decide whether the inclusion of a PhD student will be included in the protocol and become a permanent requirement for the composition of these review panels. Although it is at this point in time not possible to refer to the outcomes of the pilot, it has become clear that the Dutch Minister of Education considers it very important to include a student member, if only because this is required by the European Standards and Guidelines.
- At the time of writing, KNAW, VSNU and NWO are still working out some of the practical details of this arrangement: the precise role of the student representative in a panel, his or her independence (quite a lot of research assessments involve all the research in a specific discipline carried out by universities in the Netherlands, so it may be difficult to find a PhD student in this discipline who is independent), and the best way to recruit a student representative. Since the universities are ultimately responsible for the composition of the assessment committee, the issue of including a PhD student in committees that assess research units will also be discussed in the upcoming meeting of the SOOV, the VSNU's steering group on education, research and valorisation, that is scheduled for early December 2018.
- The result of the decision by the presidents of VSNU, KNAW and NWO to include a student member in the panels assessing a research unit is that the requirement of the standard that was not met until now, will be met as of early 2019.

- We therefore feel that we now comply with Standard 2.4 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.3. ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

The Register Committee had concerns about the complaints (in the case of assessments of research units) and appeals (in the case of assessments of degree programmes) and their handling by the Board of QANU. In particular, the Register Committee noted that QANU did not offer the possibility for degree programmes to submit an appeal and that it was QANU's Board that decides whether an appeal is justified and whether it leads to a revision of the panel's report.

QANU's response:

- In its meeting of 10 October 2018, QANU's Board approved a strongly revised procedure for complaints and appeals that meets the Register Committee's objections.
- The essence of the revised procedure for appeals is that institutions can submit an appeal against the assessment of one of their programmes or research units by a review panel supported by QANU.⁸ The appeal will be assessed by an independent Appeals Committee, installed by QANU's Board. This Appeals Committee has two permanent members, both of them legal experts with an academic background. In addition, QANU's Board will appoint a third member for every single appeal submitted. This third member will have expertise in the discipline covered by the degree programme or research unit.
- The Appeals Committee decides whether an appeal is justified and should be accepted. If this is the case, the Appeals Committee asks the review panel that assessed the programme or research unit to reconsider its assessment, taking into account the appeal submitted by the institution and the Appeals Committee's decision.
- The essence of the procedure for submitting complaints is that anyone participating in an assessment supported by QANU can submit a complaint if he or she feels offended in any way by someone representing QANU, be it a project manager or secretary, a member of a panel supported by QANU, QANU's director or one of QANU's board members.
- The revised procedure applies both to assessments of degree programmes and assessments of research units, thereby meeting one of the Register Committee's objections. It also meets the other formal objection that QANU's Board decides whether an appeal is justified: appeals will be treated by the new and independent Appeals Committee. The revised procedure is attached to this report as Appendix 4.
- We therefore feel that we now comply with Standard 2.7 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.4. ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The Register Committee was critical about various aspects that are related to this standard. In particular, the Register Committee established that students and employer representatives are not represented in the Board. It also had questions about how QANU ensures a clear separation between its assessments and its consultancy activities.

QANU's response:

⁸ It has to be admitted that QANU's revised appeals procedure is heavily inspired by EQAR's appeals procedure, a procedure that QANU came to know better than envisaged.

- In its meeting of 20 June 2018, QANU's Board decided to add a member representing students to the Board. This new board member will be formally appointed in the board meeting that is scheduled for 12 December 2018.
- The Board invited LSVB and ISO, the two most important student organisations in the Netherlands⁹, to nominate a candidate for this new position on the board. LSVB and ISO agreed that it would be a good idea to add a student representative to the board and accepted the invitation to nominate a candidate. LSVB and ISO nominated a candidate who has a lot of relevant experience and expertise. This new board member will be formally appointed in the board meeting that is scheduled for 12 December 2018. As a result, QANU will have a wider stakeholder involvement in its governance as of late 2018.
- QANU's Board decided to formalize the membership of a student representative by including it in its statutes. It also decided that the student representative will be appointed for a period of two years (whereas the other board members are appointed for three years) and that this membership can not be renewed (whereas other board members can be appointed for two additional periods of three years) in order to make sure that the student representative has relevant and recent experience as a student. These specific conditions for the membership of the student representative deviate from QANU's statutes. The Board therefore decided to adapt Article 5 of QANU's Statutes, laying down the requirements for the composition of the board. The new version of this article can be found in Appendix 6.
- In addition, QANU's Board also discussed the potential involvement of employers, another important group of stakeholders. QANU's Board established that the individual members of the board have a lot of knowledge, experience and qualifications relating to sectors outside higher education where graduates of degree programmes find employment. The Board agreed that the members of the board should make their involvement in sectors outside higher education more explicit. The Board members are convinced that an overview of their experience and qualifications will reveal that the Board as a whole can take the relevant perspectives of sectors outside higher education where students will find a job after their graduation into account when necessary.
- The Board decided against adding a representative of employers to the board at short notice, partly because such a board member would probably represent only a fragment of the labour market for graduates, partly because the size of the board should not be exceeded any further. According to QANU's Statutes, the board has a maximum of seven members. This number will be reached when a student representative is added to the board. In order to make explicit that the board members have knowledge, expertise and qualifications of sectors outside higher education, the board decided to adapt the statutes, adding as a formal requirement that the board has such knowledge, expertise and qualifications. This adaptation is included in the new version of Article 5 of the statutes (cf. Appendix 6). The Board will also produce an overview of these knowledge, expertise and qualifications that will be updated on an annual basis and conduct an evaluation on the basis of this overview. If the Board concludes on the basis of such an evaluation that the knowledge and expertise of sectors outside higher education have to be strengthened, the Board can decide to look for a successor of one of the current board members with a different profile. The overview of the knowledge, expertise and qualifications will be made available to the review panel prior to the site visit.
- The Board is convinced that QANU's independence and autonomy is sufficiently guaranteed if the board is extended with a student member and if the knowledge, expertise and experience of individual board members with sectors outside higher education is made more explicit, also as a criterion for selecting and appointing new board members in the future. To that end, the Board has made this a formal obligation by including it in QANU's Statutes.

⁹ LSVB is short for *Landelijke Studenten Vakbond* (in English: Dutch Student Union), ISO is short for *Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg* (in English: Dutch National Students' Association).

- QANU's policy to ensure the independence of project managers who act as secretary of a review panel and also contribute to consultancy activities has not changed. In a nutshell, our policy is that a project manager who acts as secretary of a review panel has to be in a position to sign the NVAO's form for confidentiality and independence. This means that a project manager who contributed to consultancy activities for a specific degree programme or research unit is not independent in relation to that programme or unit for a period of five years after these consultancy activities. The project manager is therefore not allowed to act as secretary of a panel that assessed the programme or unit for a period of five years after the consultancy activities.
- QANU's Board has responded to the Register Committee's formal objection that QANU's Board has no positions for stakeholders by deciding to extend the board with an additional member who represents students. QANU's Board thinks that its members have sufficient knowledge, experience and qualifications relating to sectors outside higher education to allow them to take the perspective of the world outside academia into account. The Board has decided to make this explicit in an overview of knowledge, expertise and qualifications that will be updated on an annual basis. QANU has written out its policy aimed at preventing independence issues relating to project managers who are also involved in consultancy activities and included this policy in its Quality Handbook. QANU assumes that it has thereby responded adequately and that it now complies at least substantially with Standard 3.1.

3.5. ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The Register Committee has established that QANU lacks a systematic approach towards producing thematic analysis.

QANU's response:

- In its meeting of 10 October 2018, QANU's Board approved a revised policy for analysing and sharing outcomes of assessments supported by QANU. This policy is in essence a confirmation and formalisation of QANU's current policy with regard to thematic analysis, but it does define explicit aims and objectives for various types of publications and activities. In this respect, QANU's approach has become more pro-active and formalised. The document laying down this policy is attached to this report as Appendix 5.
- The starting point for the policy for analysing and sharing results and outcomes of assessments supported by QANU, is that QANU acquires a lot of information in its assessments that is useful and interesting at a higher level of aggregation than that of individual assessments. This information can, for instance, be used to develop analyses of developments in higher education and scientific research in general and in the external quality assurance within these sectors in particular. The analyses can contribute to the reflection on and the further development of the systems of external quality assurance for degree programmes and research units.
- In essence, the aims and objectives phrased in the policy plan are:
 - QANU will continue to produce short articles on various aspects of assessments that are based on the knowledge and experience acquired by QANU's project managers. QANU aims at publishing at least one article per year.
 - QANU will continue to produce policy papers on current issues related to and fitting within the discussion about the further development of the accreditation system. QANU will distribute them among relevant stakeholders and also publish them on its website. QANU aims at producing at least one policy paper every two years.
 - QANU will continue to organise expert meetings. The themes for these meetings will be derived from the assessments QANU conducts. QANU will produce reports of these expert meetings and distribute these reports among relevant stakeholders and publish them on its

website. QANU aims at organising at least one expert meeting every two years dealing with a current issue and at sharing the results of this meeting.

- QANU intends to continue to produce and publish state of the art reports, but it is dependent on the preferences of the degree programmes. Clusters of degree programmes do not always ask an assessment committee to produce a state of the art report. It is not really possible to predict how many state of the art reports QANU will produce on an annual basis, partly because the number of assessments QANU conducts per year can differ substantially, partly because there are clusters of programmes that don't appreciate a state of the art report.

The policy for analysing and sharing results and outcomes of assessments supported by QANU constitutes a systematic approach towards producing thematic analysis. We therefore feel that we now comply with Standard 3.4 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.6. ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

In its deferral of QANU's application, the Register Committee referred to the lack of a formalised and integrated approach of internal quality assurance, an issue relevant for ESG 3.6. In its decision, the Register Committee assesses this particular standard as 'compliant'. The information provided in QANU's additional representation has apparently convinced the Register Committee that the review panel's assessment of this standard was justified.

QANU's response:

- Since the assessment in 2016, QANU has taken various measures to strengthen the internal quality assurance policy and make it more formalised and integrated. Given the Register Committee's initial doubts, QANU feels it is opportune to briefly describe what QANU has achieved.
- QANU's staff members have jointly committed themselves to a more standardised and shared approach that is more in line with QANU's mission, vision and values. The first result of this shift in attitude has been the development of a Quality Handbook, a systematic description of all internal and external agreements, procedures, protocols and guidelines QANU used for the assessments of degree programmes and research units. The aim of developing this Handbook is to further enhance the uniformity and consistency of QANU's working methods for assessments of degree programmes and research units. The Handbook contains extensive chapters on the assessment of degree programmes and the assessment of research units. In addition, it also describes the internal procedures and agreements related to our internal organisation, our operational management and human resource management and our quality assurance policy.
- The Quality Handbook offers links to underlying documents that, for instance, provide a more detailed description of a procedure or describe the background of a procedure. The links can also refer to external documents, for instance documents on the NVAO's website, the current version of the Standard Evaluation Protocol or the home page of ENQA or EQAR. QANU has started to update these underlying documents. QANU has adopted a more uniform and professional style for these documents, a format that contains QANU's logo and mission statement. The idea behind this change of style is that QANU should be able to publish the documents or to distribute them among relevant stakeholders.
- Of course, developing a Quality Handbook and updating the underlying documents is a Herculean task in itself, but maintaining the Handbook and the documents and keeping them up to date is perhaps even more demanding. The current version of the Handbook covers all relevant aspects of our work, but some of these aspects are not yet described in sufficient detail. Some aspects will have to be revised rather soon, when the revised accreditation framework will take effect. The same is true for several underlying documents. One of QANU's senior staff members has

taken on the task to coordinate the maintenance and actualisation of the underlying documents. Several of QANU's staff members will contribute to keeping the Handbook itself up to date.

- The main aim of developing the Handbook is to allow all of QANU's staff members to work in a uniform and consistent way. This is a very important component of QANU's internal quality assurance policy.

The Register Committee had already established that QANU complies with ESG 3.6. We feel that our compliance with this standard has increased as a result of the development of our Quality Handbook, which presents a more formalised and integrated approach to our internal quality assurance.

Part II: Follow-up on the ENQA Agency Review in 2016

4. QANU's response to the recommendations of ENQA's Review Panel

In June 2016, Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) was assessed by an international review panel chaired by professor Henrik Toft Jensen (Research Fellow at Roskilde Universitet, DK).¹⁰ The main aim of this assessment was to determine whether QANU operates in compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines. The report to be produced by the review panel was aimed at determining whether QANU meets the criteria for full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In addition, the report was also aimed at serving as a basis for a renewed registration in the Register, maintained by EQAR.

The review panel assessed the standards from the European Standards and Guidelines 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 conduct – 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

On 30 November 2016, ENQA's Board decided to reconfirm QANU's membership of ENQA for another period of five years on the basis of the Final Report of the ENQA review panel. The ENQA Board noted that the review panel had phrased several recommendations to further improve QANU's activities as a quality assurance agency. The Board invited QANU to prepare a follow-up report on the implementation of the review panel's recommendations and to submit that report to the ENQA Board within two years of the Board's decision to reconfirm QANU's membership (i.e., before the end of November 2018).

One of the purposes of this document is to serve as the follow-up report for the Board of ENQA. This section of the document contains an overview of the commendations and the recommendations phrased by the review panel and of the measures taken by QANU as a follow-up to the panel's recommendations.

4.1. Commendations

In its final report, the review panel phrased two general commendations:

Panel 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.*

¹⁰ The other members of the review panel were: 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, and 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).

It is assumed that QANU has issued this guideline based on its experience out of numerous assessments conducted.

Panel commendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- Of course, we are very pleased with these commendations, we consider them to be an important recognition for the work we do. We are fully aware of the importance of our reports: in the case of assessments of degree programmes (by far the biggest part of the assessments we conduct), they serve as the basis for re-accreditation by the NVAO, the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation. We spent a lot of time and effort in maintaining and further improving the quality of the reports and we appreciate it very much that the review panel acknowledges these efforts explicitly.
- It is our experience that degree programmes often find it difficult to grasp the essence of the NVAO's assessment framework. Programmes highly appreciate our guideline. They consider it an important instrument that helps them in the preparations for their assessment. We are very glad that the review panel shares this appreciation.

4.2. Recommendations related to part 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines

The review panel's also phrased recommendations. In what follows, we list these recommendations one by one and describe for each of them what we have done as a follow-up, and which measures we have taken as a response to the recommendations.

4.2.1. ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- In 2017, a core group of staff members, representing the organisation as a whole (and including the director, three project managers, a project assistant and a secretary), participated in a series of sessions aimed at discussing and reflecting on mission-related issues. These sessions were prepared and supervised by external consultants and were at least partly meant to find answers to questions raised by our review panel. This series of sessions was organised as a result of increased competition (see below), but also because part of the staff felt uncertain about the profile and identity of QANU, the (effects of) increased competition, the internal organisation and the division of tasks and responsibilities and the internal communication. Another question that led to the reflection sessions was whether it would be possible for QANU to enter new markets and acquire orders outside higher education, preferably on a structural basis. In these sessions, the staff members discussed questions such as: what are we good at? Where is our passion? How do we earn our money?
- One of the answers to these questions was that QANU should become more strongly customer-oriented. The staff members agreed that this implied that QANU should devote more attention to several aspects of its approach of assessments, for example the way we present ourselves,

the way we communicate, the way we take certain things for granted. At the same time, the staff members also agreed that QANU should continue to uphold its standards relating to independence and professionalism, that QANU should not become a commercial organisation that primarily aims at satisfying the demands and wishes of its customers, that quality would continue to be a core value of QANU's work.

- Among the things that were discussed in these sessions were: the activities we undertake, our strengths and weaknesses, the profiles of the positions we offer, the demands and wishes of our customers, the changes in these demands and wishes, the strengths and weaknesses of our main competitors, our attraction for market and business, any new products we might develop, et cetera. The result of these sessions was a kind of synthesis: four scenarios based on varying degrees of competition (from weak to strong) and developments within the system of external quality assurance (from favourable to unfavourable). In addition, we also agreed on a strategy for the future, including the definition of core values, breakthrough projects, milestones and rules. The participants agreed on three core values (quality, reliability, and customer focus). The breakthrough projects included projects on our internal quality assurance, on internal and external communication (including a new format for our quotations), on new markets (this is still ongoing), and on culture (core values, focus on customers).
- We feel that these sessions have had a serious impact on the way we approach universities, our main customers. We have become more service-oriented, we are more strongly aware of the need to take the demands and wishes of degree programmes and research units into account. Recent feedback from representatives of universities confirms that this shift in approach is perceived and recognized. The sessions have also had an internal impact: compared to 2016, the staff as a whole has a stronger sense of purpose, a more positive and constructive attitude, a stronger feeling of shared responsibility for the organisation as a whole and a bigger job satisfaction. This is illustrated rather nicely by the outcomes of a series of interviews by the new *personeelsvertegenwoordiging* (literally: staff representation, a Works Council for small organisations, a committee of three elected staff members who regularly discuss all kinds of issues related to the organisation and the working conditions of the staff with the director): all staff members appreciate the work ethic and the ambition to bring about improvement. The internal impact is also partly due to changes in the staff, the fact that QANU has new coordinators for assessments since the beginning of 2018. The loss of experience initially seemed to be a risk, but it also (and probably even more so) turned out to be an opportunity for renewal and improvement.
- As part of the measure taken to strengthen the internal quality assurance, QANU has made the translation of its mission into its day-to-day operation more visible and explicit in its new Quality Handbook that was developed after QANU was assessed in June 2016. The Quality Handbook contains chapters on our core activities: assessments of degree programmes and assessments of research units. These chapters refer explicitly to QANU's mission and show that the core activities we conduct are directly derived from our mission. The Quality Handbook will be described in more detail in our response to the review panel's recommendations for ESG 3.6. The new format for documents describing procedures or containing guidelines contains the mission statement. The new format for reports, which is currently being developed, will also contain the mission. These measures increase the visibility of QANU's mission in its day-to-day operation.
- Until recently, QANU did not have a proper organisational chart. At the request of the review panel that assessed QANU in June 2016, QANU's director produced a first version of such a chart during the site visit. As the review panel rightly pointed out, this draft version lacked depth and detail and was in need of more serious consideration and discussion. After the site visit, QANU designed a new organisational chart, which provides a better representation of QANU's internal structure and relations. This chart was discussed in QANU's internal staff meeting and discussed and approved by QANU's Board. The revised organisational chart is attached to this report as

Appendix 3. It contains QANU's mission statement and thereby supports the visibility of this mission statement within the agency as such.

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

QANU's response:

- Until recently, QANU did not actively develop and apply strategic planning approaches. This has changed: we spent a lot of time thinking about strategic planning for the last two years, partly as a result of the outcomes of our assessment (i.e., the recommendations phrased by the review panel), partly as a result of an external development.
- Until approximately two and a half years ago, QANU's position as a quality assurance agency was relatively clear and stable. QANU more or less conducted all assessments of degree programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands. This situation changed in the course of 2016, when universities decided that they could no longer assign contracts to QANU without involving other interested agencies in the procedure. Since then, universities participating in cluster assessments invite several quality assurance agencies to submit a proposal for the assessment of a cluster of degree programmes. Rather unexpectedly, QANU was confronted with serious competitors, in particular one agency that had adopted a much more commercial and customer-oriented approach than QANU. This competing agency was rather successful in acquiring contracts, among other things because it promised to deploy one secretary only, even for large cluster assessments having quite a lot of site visits.
- As a result of this increased competition, we seriously considered our approach and working methods in the initial phase of an assessment and introduced several changes in the way we present ourselves. We designed a new format for our quotations, in which we pay more attention to our profile and our distinguishing characteristics and in which we stress our expertise, our experience, our familiarity with the world of academia, the quality of our work (demonstrated, among other things, by our international recognition) and our reports. We changed the way we communicate by taking less things for granted, by making our philosophy and starting points more explicit. Since then, we have been able to compete more seriously. In the last year, we seem to have recovered and reclaimed our position.
- In the first half of 2017, QANU has conducted a series of interviews with various stakeholders who have extensive experience with assessments supported by QANU (in most cases, representatives of universities, but also former panel members who participated in several assessments). QANU has used the outcomes of these interviews to finetune various aspects of its approach and methods used for its assessments.
- To conclude: since our assessment in 2016, we developed a much more explicit and focused approach to our strategic planning. This development was not initiated by (changes in) our mission statement, but by the recommendations of the ENQA review panel and by external developments. Although our formal mission statement remained unchanged, we made our vision and profile explicit for use in our day-to-day activities. The resulting new approach made it possible to realise our aims and objectives within a changing environment.

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- On several occasions, QANU's Board discussed the review panel's recommendation to reflect on QANU's governance structure and to expand the board to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement in QANU's governance. The Board invited representatives of the two major student organisations in the Netherlands, LSVB and ISO, to attend the Board's meeting of 13 December 2017 and to provide issues for discussion with the Board. The Board and the representatives of LSVB and ISO agreed that it would be good to make the relation between QANU and LSVB and ISO more systematic.
- On 20 June 2018, QANU's Board decided to add a student member to the board. The Board decided to invite LSVB and ISO to nominate a candidate for this new position on the board. QANU's director discussed the Board's decision with representatives of the boards of LSVB and ISO, who accepted the invitation to nominate a candidate. LSVB and ISO decided to make the procedure to identify a suitable candidate as open and transparent as possible and drafted a job advertisement which was distributed within their networks. The outcome of this procedure is that LSVB and ISO nominated a candidate who has a lot of relevant experience and expertise. This new board member will be formally appointed in the board meeting that is scheduled for 12 December 2018. As a result, QANU will have a wider stakeholder involvement in its governance as of late 2018.
- QANU's Board decided to formalize the membership of a student representative by including it in its statutes. It also decided that the student representative will be appointed for a period of two years (whereas the other board members are appointed for three years) and that this membership can not be renewed (whereas other board members can be appointed for two additional periods of three years) in order to make sure that the student representative has relevant and recent experience as a student. These specific conditions for the membership of the student representative deviate from the current version of the Statutes. The Board decided therefore to adapt Article 5 of QANU's Statutes, laying down the requirements for the composition of the board. The new version of this article, which explicitly specifies the inclusion of a student member and the conditions that hold for this board member, can be found in Appendix 6.
- QANU is glad that EQAR addressed the issue of the inclusion of a PhD student as student representative in panels that assess research units, as QANU is not in a position to decide itself that these panels should contain a PhD student. On 29 September 2018, EQAR sent a letter to the three institutions responsible for the SEP (the Standard Evaluation Protocol, the framework that serves as the starting point for research assessments). These institutions are the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). EQAR's letter explained that the current version of the SEP does not conform to the European Standards and Guidelines, because it does not prescribe that a panel that conducts an assessment covering a PhD programme (a third cycle programmes in terms of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area) has a student member. The presidents of VSNU, KNAW and NOW discussed EQAR's letter in a meeting in September 2018 and agreed that EQAR had identified an issue that needed immediate attention and action. The presidents decided to start a pilot project with immediate effect, the impact of which will be that as of 2019, panels that assess a research unit that offers a PhD programme on the basis of the Standard Evaluation Protocol will have a student representative (i.e., a PhD student) as member.
- At the time of writing, KNAW, VSNU and NWO are still working out the practical details of this arrangement, relating to the precise role of the student representative in a panel, his or her independence (quite a lot of research assessments involve all the research in a specific discipline carried out by universities in the Netherlands) or the best way to recruit a student representative. Since the universities are ultimately responsible for the composition of the assessment committee, the issue of including a PhD student in committees that assess research units will

also be discussed in the upcoming meeting of the SOOV, the VSNU's steering group on education, research and valorisation.

4.2.2. ESG 3.2 Official status

No recommendations.

4.2.3. ESG 3.3 Independence

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- As explained above, QANU's Board has decided to add a student member to the board in order to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement. In this way, QANU safeguards its independence and autonomy more thoroughly, as suggested by the review panel.
- In addition, QANU's Board also discussed the potential involvement of another important group of stakeholders, viz. employers. QANU's Board felt that the individual members of the board have a lot of knowledge, experience and qualifications relating to sectors outside higher education where graduates of degree programmes find employment. The Board agreed that the members of the board should make their involvement in sectors outside higher education more explicit. The Board members are convinced that an overview of their experience and qualifications will reveal that the Board as a whole can take the perspectives of sectors outside higher education where students will find a job after their graduation into account when necessary.
- The Board decided against adding another member (a representative of employers) to the board at short notice, partly because such a board member would probably represent only a fragment of the labour market for graduates, partly because the size of the board should not be exceeded any further. According to QANU's Statutes, the board has a maximum of seven members. This number will be reached when a student representative is added to the board. In order to make explicit that the board members have knowledge, expertise and qualifications relating to sectors outside higher education where students will find employment after their graduation, the board decided to change the statutes, adding as a formal requirement that the board has such knowledge, expertise and qualifications. The Board will also produce an overview of these knowledge, expertise and qualifications that will be updated on an annual basis and conduct an evaluation on the basis of this overview. If the Board concludes on the basis of such an evaluation that the knowledge and expertise of relevant sectors outside higher education have to be strengthened, the Board can decide to look for a successor of one of the current board members with a different profile.
- The Board feels that QANU's independence and autonomy is sufficiently guaranteed if the board is expanded with a student member and if the knowledge, expertise and experience of individual board members with sectors outside higher education is made more explicit, also as a criterion for selecting and appointing new board members. To that end, the Board has made this a formal obligation by including it in QANU's Statutes.

4.2.4. ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

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

QANU's response:

- In its meeting of 10 October 2018, QANU's Board adopted a policy for analysing and sharing results and outcomes of assessments supported by QANU. This policy is in essence a confirmation and formalisation of QANU's current policy with regard to thematic analysis, but it does define explicit aims and objectives for various types of publications and activities. The document laying down this policy is attached to this report as Appendix 5.
- The starting point for the policy for analysing and sharing results and outcomes of assessments supported by QANU is that QANU acquires a lot of information in its assessments that is useful and interesting at a higher level of aggregation than that of individual assessments. This information can, for instance, be used to develop analyses of developments in higher education and scientific research in general and in the external quality assurance within these sectors in particular. The analyses can contribute to the reflection on and the further development of the systems of external quality assurance for degree programmes and research units.
- In essence, the aims and objectives phrased in the policy plan are:
 - QANU will continue to produce short articles on various aspects of assessments that are based on the knowledge and experience acquired by QANU's project managers. QANU aims at publishing at least one article per year.
 - QANU will continue to produce policy papers on current issues related to and fitting within the discussion about the further development of the accreditation system. QANU will distribute them among relevant stakeholders and also publish them on our website. QANU aims at producing at least one policy paper every two years.
 - QANU will continue to organise expert meetings. The themes for these meetings will be derived from the assessments QANU conducts. QANU will produce reports of these expert meetings and distribute these reports among relevant stakeholders and publish them on our website. QANU aims at organising at least one expert meeting every two years dealing with a current issue and at sharing the results of this meeting.
 - QANU intends to continue to produce and publish state of the art reports, but it is dependent on the preferences of the degree programmes. Clusters of degree programmes do not always ask an assessment committee to produce a state of the art report. It is difficult to predict how many state of the arts reports QANU will produce on an annual basis, partly because the number of assessments QANU conducts per year can differ substantially, partly because there are clusters of programmes that don't appreciate a state of the art report.
- QANU is not in a position to produce system-wide analyses (analyses of the system of external quality assurance in higher education as a whole), as this is the domain of other stakeholders in the field (for instance, the NVAO or Inspectorate of Education).

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- The role of QANU's project managers in publications and activities that can be considered thematic analysis will be made more prominent and more explicit. Project managers will be given the opportunity to produce short articles or policy papers or to participate in expert meetings and write reports covering the proceedings and outcomes of these meetings.

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- QANU is in favour of intensifying the exchange of information with other relevant stakeholders in order to support the further development of the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands. In the recent past, QANU has taken several initiatives to strengthen the cooperation and intensify the exchange of information with relevant stakeholders.
- Since a couple of years, QANU's director has had regular meetings (in principle bi-monthly) with the director of NQA, a Dutch quality assurance agency that has recently become a member of ENQA. These meetings aim at exchanging information and learning from each other. The relations with other quality assurance agencies operating in the Netherlands are somewhat more distant. There are considerable differences in terms of approach and working methods between NQA and QANU on the one hand and the other agencies on the other.
- The relation with the Ministry has improved over the last few years. The (primarily informal) contacts with the Ministry's staff members dealing with external quality assurance and accreditation have increased and improved. The Ministry seems to recognize and appreciate QANU's expertise and experience in the area of assessments.
- The relation with the NVAO is stable. QANU actively participates in the meetings (twice or three times a year) between NVAO and the quality assurance agencies that, among other things, serve as a platform for sharing information and experiences. Once a year, one of the NVAO's board members and the director of QANU meet to discuss QANU's recent achievements. In October 2018, a group of NVAO staff members visited QANU to discuss the composition of assessment committees, the NVAO's explicit requirements and requirements that seem to be more implicit. It was agreed that such meetings will take place on an annual basis from now on. The president of QANU's Board and QANU's director have an annual informal meeting with the Dutch board members of the NVAO to discuss all relevant developments, from changes in the system of external quality assurance as a whole to problems or complications related to individual assessments (taking into account the required confidentiality). Of course, there is frequent occasional contact between the staff members of both organisations to exchange information.
- The relation with the major student organisations LSVB and ISO has become much stronger and systematic since June 2016. Representatives of LSVB and ISO participated in the meeting of QANU's Board on 17 December 2017. LSVB and ISO have nominated the first student representative in QANU's board. Together with LSVB, ISO and NQA, QANU is currently preparing a joint session aimed at students who recently participated in an assessment, either as a student member of an assessment committee or as a representative of a programme. The aim of this session will be to look for ways to improve students' contributions to assessments. The session will take place in February 2019. It is probable that such sessions will be organised on a more systematic basis in the future.
- Over the last two years, QANU's director participated in a sounding board group for the evaluation by the Inspectorate of Education of recent changes in the Dutch system of external quality assurance. The participation in this group strengthened the relations with other participants and the organisations and institutions they represented.
- To summarize: over the last few years, QANU has successfully strengthened the relation with the student organisations LSVB and ISO, with the Ministry and with the Inspectorate of Education. It has maintained its good relations with the NVAO, the VSNU and the universities in

the Netherlands. The relations with student organisations LSVB and ISO, with NQA and with the NVAO are systematic and have a more or less formal basis.

4.2.5. ESG 3.5 Resources

Panel recommendation: *The review panel recommends formalising various human resource management approaches into one document.*

QANU's response:

- Since the assessment in June 2016, QANU spent a considerable amount of time and effort on the introduction of a Quality Handbook. In QANU's view, the Quality Handbook is part of a general evolution towards an approach that is both more formalised and more strongly focused on development. The philosophy underlying the development of the Handbook is that every single staff member will have to work in accordance with this handbook. Therefore, every staff member is involved in and contributes to the handbook. QANU's staff is fully committed to the underlying philosophy.
- This Quality Handbook contains a chapter that deals with all relevant aspects of personnel policy and human resource management. This chapter includes, among other things, sections on the types of positions QANU offers, the competencies required for these positions and the tasks associated with them, on the terms of employment QANU applies, the recruitment of new staff members, the guidance, mentoring and supervision of new staff members, the development and assessment of staff members, the opportunities for training, and termination of employment. The Quality Handbook is described in some more detail in QANU's response to the review panel's recommendations relating to ESG 3.6.

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- QANU's policy for analysing and sharing outcomes of assessments relies on utilising the experience and qualifications of QANU's staff members. QANU intends to increase its participation in European activities such as workshops, conferences and seminars. In 2018, as a start, QANU's director participated in a seminar organised by ENQA in June in Brussels and in the European Quality Assurance Forum in November in Vienna. Other staff members will also undertake similar activities in the near future. See also QANU's response to the recommendations relating to ESG 3.4.

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

QANU's response:

- On various occasions, QANU has suggested that it would be a good idea to involve the quality assurance agencies operating in the Netherlands in the training of secretaries. Unfortunately, the NVAO has not yet agreed to join forces or to cooperate when it comes to the training of secretaries. One of the issues that leads to discussion is the design and contents of the training.
- After the recent amendment of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, the NVAO seems to have become even more strongly convinced that it is its exclusive task and responsibility to train the secretaries.

4.2.6. ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

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

QANU's response:

- Since the assessment in 2016, QANU has taken various measures to strengthen the internal quality assurance policy and make it more formalised and integrated. QANU's staff members have jointly committed themselves to a more standardised and shared approach that is more in line with QANU's mission, vision and values. The first result of this shift in attitude has been the development of a Quality Handbook, a systematic description of all internal and external agreements, procedures, protocols and guidelines QANU used for the assessments of degree programmes and research units. The aim of developing this Handbook is to further enhance the uniformity and consistency of QANU's working methods for assessments of degree programmes and research units. The Handbook contains extensive chapters on the assessment of degree programmes and the assessment of research units. In addition, it also describes the internal procedures and agreements related to our internal organisation, our operational management and human resource management and our quality assurance policy. The chapter on the assessment of degree programmes contains sections on:
 - the formal framework for assessments of degree programmes;
 - the acquisition of contracts for assessments;
 - the start of an assessment;
 - composing a review panel, setting the dates for the site visits;
 - agreeing on the deployment of (internal or external) secretaries of the panel;
 - practical and logistic preparations for the site visit;
 - substantive preparations for the site visit, preparatory visit;
 - instruction of the chair and the other panel members;
 - preparing a format for the assessment report;
 - the site visit;
 - shortly after the site visit;
 - calibration;
 - producing the draft version of the assessment report;
 - the procedure to invite a programme to read the draft report for factual inaccuracies;
 - finalising the assessment report;
 - finalising and evaluating the assessment;
 - after finalisation: responding to questions from the NVAO.

The chapter on assessments of research units has a similar structure. In addition, the Quality Handbook contains chapters on QANU's internal organisation, operational management, human resource management, quality assurance and quality management, external relations and stakeholders, and internal and external communication.

- The Quality Handbook offers links to underlying documents that, for instance, provide a more detailed description of a procedure or describe the background of a procedure. The links can also refer to external documents, for instance documents on the NVAO's website, the current version of the Standard Evaluation Protocol or the home page of ENQA or EQAR. QANU has started to update these underlying documents, both from the perspective of content and when it comes to their layout. QANU has adopted a more uniform and professional style for these documents, a format that contains QANU's logo and mission statement. The idea behind this change of style is that QANU should be able to publish the documents or to distribute them among relevant stakeholders.

- Of course, developing a Quality Handbook and updating the underlying documents is a Herculean task in itself, but maintaining the Handbook and the documents and keeping them up to date is perhaps even more demanding. The current version of the Handbook covers all relevant aspects of our work, but some of these aspects are not yet described in sufficient detail. Some aspects will have to be adapted as soon as the revised accreditation framework will take effect. The same is true for several underlying documents. One of QANU's senior staff members has taken on the task to coordinate the maintenance and actualisation of the underlying documents. Several of QANU's staff members will contribute to keeping the Handbook itself up to date.
- QANU's staff discussed a prefinal version of the chapter on assessments of degree programmes on its annual 'heidag' (a study day, a retreat outside QANU's office to reflect on aspects of our work). QANU's staff members were both very pleased about the availability of a single document containing descriptions of all relevant aspects of our work and a bit frightened by the sheer size of the document and the efforts needed to keep it up to date. All present agreed, however, that it was necessary to have such a document in order to achieve the aim to further strengthen the uniformity and consistency of our assessment. We realise the added value of the Handbook for ourselves (the procedures to be applied are described in detail) and for the organisation as a whole (the consistence and coherence of the assessments will be strengthened).
- The main aim of developing the Handbook is to allow all of QANU's staff members to work in a uniform and consistent way. This is a very important component of QANU's internal quality assurance policy.
- In one of its recent meetings, QANU's Board decided to publish the Quality Handbook on QANU's website. The Board is aware of the fact that QANU can become more vulnerable in a time of increased competition, but decided that transparency is more important. At the time of writing, the Quality Handbook is not available on the website yet, mainly because quite a few of the underlying documents are still in need of updating. Several staff members are currently updating these documents.
- Another measure we took to further strengthen the quality of our work is the introduction of intervision sessions, in which our project managers discuss, reflect on and provide solutions for any issues in need of attention. The project managers appreciate these sessions very much, they feel they really learn from each other, they become aware of the way their colleagues look at quality and what they do to further improve it.

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

QANU's response:

- Another measure we took to further strengthen our internal quality assurance was the development of a new procedure for acquiring feedback on the evaluation of the assessments we conduct. Over the years, we have used various procedures, both quantitative and qualitative. Because the numbers of either contact persons from the degree programmes and research units on the one hand and the panel members on the other hand are rather small, we have decided not to pursue quantitative approaches any longer.
- In the new procedure, the project manager is responsible for conducting the evaluation. After the assessment reports have been finalised and sent to the institutions, the project manager calls the contact person from the institution to discuss his or her impression and opinion about the assessment. In this call, the project manager raises at least the following issues:
 - The programme's assessment of the services provided by QANU: what went well, what could be improved?

- The project manager's guidance and support in the course of the process.
- The quality of the secretary during the site visit.
- The quality of the assessment report.
- Advice and suggestions for further improvement of QANU's services.

Project managers are expected to produce a brief report containing the most important outcomes of the discussion. The outcomes of the evaluations are discussed twice a year in QANU's staff meeting. This discussion will focus on the lessons that can be learnt from the evaluations.

- We refer to QANU's response to the review panel's recommendation relating to ESG 3.7 when it comes to follow-up measures.

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

QANU's response:

- We are fully aware of the need to follow the work of our freelance project managers closely, to make sure that they know about any changes we make in our working methods and to take specific measures to ensure that their work meets all relevant requirements. Since the assessment in 2016, we have taken various measures to that effect. A few examples are described below.
- First, since we noticed that there can be variation in the quality of the reports produced by freelancers, we are writing a guideline that describes our requirements for assessment reports and makes issues explicit that are sometimes interpreted in slightly different ways by freelancers. The basis for this guideline is an internal discussion about the quality of reports, which revealed that even QANU's project managers do not always agree completely on how to write the perfect report (if such a report exists...). The guideline is explicitly aimed at freelance project managers, but it is useful for the project managers employed by QANU as well.
- Second, we are preparing a training session for freelance project managers to discuss the changes in NVAO's assessment framework that will take effect on 1 February 2019. The aim of this session will be to familiarise the freelance project managers with the revised framework and to ensure that they are able to work in accordance with this revised framework. The underlying aim is, of course, to guarantee the uniformity and consistency for all assessments conducted by QANU and to ensure that these assessments are conducted in full accordance with the relevant framework.
- Third, we decided that both the project leader and the freelance project manager who will support a panel in a site visit will participate in the preparatory visit approximately six weeks in advance of the site visit. As a result of this measure, representatives of the programme get to know the freelance project manager, who, in turn, has the opportunity to familiarize himself with the location for the site visit. Another result is that it is less likely that there may be misunderstanding or loss of information and that it is much easier for the programme to correspond directly with the freelance project manager.
- We continue to apply other procedures to monitor the work done by freelance project managers. For instance, we apply a selection procedure that is more or less equal to the selection of project managers who will be employed by QANU, freelance secretaries participate as observer in a first site visit and are only allowed to act as secretary when there are no doubts about their knowledge of the framework and their ability to write a report that conforms to our requirements, and the reports produced by freelance secretaries are always checked by a staff member. We regularly organise meetings with our freelance project managers to discuss recent changes in the NVAO's

frameworks or in our procedures, developments and issues that deserve attention and changes within our internal organisation.

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

QANU's response:

- The Quality Handbook extensively describes the procedures QANU applies in order to guarantee and safeguard the quality of the assessments of degree programmes and research units.

4.2.7. ESG 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

Panel recommendation: *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).*

QANU's response:

- Since the assessment in 2016, we took various measures to establish a more systematic follow-up between review. For instance, we introduced intervision sessions, in which QANU's project managers reflect on and provide solutions for any issues relating to assessments in need of attention. A project manager who encounters a problem or something else that needs attention tends to discuss this with a colleague first. If necessary, the project manager also discusses the issues with QANU's director. Any issues that have an impact on QANU's working methods are also discussed in QANU's biweekly staff meetings. QANU's director discusses relevant issues in his monthly meetings with the chair of QANU's Board. QANU's director also reports any recent developments within assessments to the board as a whole, which meets four times a year. This brief listing shows that we discuss the progress of our assessments and any problems encountered at various levels in our organisation in a rather systematic way that we believe that a formal procedure would not lead to any changes in the current situation
- This brief description shows that QANU as a whole is very much focused on reflecting on and learning from developments in the assessments we support. Of course, we adapt our internal procedures when we feel that this is necessary.

4.3. Recommendations related to part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines

4.3.1. ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance conduct

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- At the suggestion of the review panel, QANU made an analysis of the Standard Evaluation Protocol from the perspective of the first part of the European Standards and Guidelines. The analysis revealed that some of the standards from the first part of the ESG may be expected to be covered by the SEP, but others less so.

- The SEP states: “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.” This reveals that ESG 1.1 (Policy for quality assurance) and ESG 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes) are covered by the SEP: committees consider quality assurance and the programme content and structure. ESG 1.4 (Student admission, progression, recognition and certification) seems to be covered as well: committees are required to look at selection and admission procedures, duration, success rates, exit numbers and career prospects. The SEP, however, does not refer explicitly to ESG 1.3 (Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment), ESG 1.5 (Teaching staff), ESG 1.6 (Learning resources and student support – the SEP does refer to supervision of PhD students and PhD programmes are supposed to address project management and communication with supervisors, subjects that fall at least partly under ESG 1.6), ESG 1.7 (Information management), ESG 1.8 (Public information), ESG 1.9 (On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes and periodic review of programmes) and ESG 1.10 (Cyclical external quality assurance).
- To be sure, this should not be taken to imply that research units offering PhD programmes do not comply with these standards or that they are not assessed within the system of internal quality assurance for research units, only that it can not be taken for granted that they are taken into consideration in the assessments of these research units.
- On the basis of the information currently available, it is difficult for us to analyse how effective the system of internal quality assurance is addressed in the SEP. Our experience is that the assessments of research units focus strongly on the quality of the research itself. PhD programmes were only introduced in the most recent version of the SEP, which is currently being evaluated by a committee and working group consisting of representatives of VSNU, KNAW, NWO, NFU (the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres) and other experts, including one of QANU’s staff members).
- We have sent the outcomes of our analysis of the SEP to the working group conducting the evaluation of the SEP.

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU’s response:

- QANU’s Board has adopted a revised and more explicit procedure for sharing the more general conclusions and outcomes of QANU’s assessments. This procedure is described in some detail in QANU’s response to the review panel’s recommendations for ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis).

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU’s response:

- It is difficult for us to guarantee that reports describing research units offering PhD programmes take the effectiveness of the system of internal quality assurance for the PhD programme into consideration. As mentioned, quality assurance is one of the aspects that has to be taken into

consideration, but the information provided by research units is normally not very extensive and the discussions are more strongly oriented towards the contents of a PhD programme than towards procedures and processes applied by the PhD programme.

- It is also difficult for us to ensure that our reports on degree programmes reflect on the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes applied by degree programmes. In the Dutch system, internal quality assurance is assessed at the level of the institution, not at the level of individual degree programmes. This means that committees assessing degree programmes have no information at their disposal on the system of internal quality assurance applied by a degree programme and that they are not in a position to assess its effectiveness. Assessment committees may discuss quality assurance in practice, for example in the case of measures taken by a programme to bring about improvements in the contents or design of a particular course, but the focus and perspective in such a discussion is not on the procedures applied, but on the outcomes of the procedures.
- To conclude, the frameworks used for assessments of both degree programmes and research units do not really allow for a serious reflection on the effectiveness of the internal quality procedures used by a programme or a research unit.

4.3.2. ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- QANU is fully aware of the tension that exists between QANU's position within the context of the system of external quality assurance in higher education in the Netherlands. In fact, QANU is more than just a stakeholder in the system: QANU is also dependent on this system. The outcomes of the discussion about the introduction of accreditation at the level of institutions (instead of degree programmes), for instance, can have a direct and strong impact on QANU's future. QANU has been very careful to separate its own future and interests from the contents of this discussion. In discussions, QANU tends to state explicitly that our opinion may be influenced by these interests. This is not always necessary, because the other stakeholders in the system are fully aware of QANU's position.
- Another, somewhat more complicated aspect of this tension is that QANU may have an interest in the outcomes of the assessments it conducts. Recently, for instance, one of the committees QANU supported raised the question whether institutions may exert pressure on QANU not to assess programmes negatively. We understand very well that committees ask such a question, especially when we urge them to provide a better and more detailed underpinning of their assessment. It is our explicit starting point, however, that we do not have an active role when it comes to assessing a programme or a research unit, that we only support a panel of experts that conduct the assessment, that these experts have explicitly confirmed their independence and that they are the ones who decide how a programme or research unit is assessed. We feel, however, that it is also our task to monitor the quality of our reports. This task may make it necessary to ask a panel for a better and more detailed underpinning of its assessment.
- QANU feels that the tension relating to QANU's position as a quality assurance agency is the result of the decision, made by the legislative powers at the time when accreditation in higher education was introduced, to create a two-level system in which the organisation that decides whether a programme receives accreditation is not the same as the organisation that conducts the assessment that forms the basis of a decision on accreditation. While there is only one

organisation that has the legal power to accredit programmes, there are several organisations that conduct assessments. This system allows for competition between quality assurance agencies.

- To be sure, QANU is not against competition, but we also feel that it is of crucial importance that agencies that are competing aim to (or are forced to) apply the same sets of starting points and operate within the rules and the 'spirit' of the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands. At the moment, however, there are only a few formal requirements or restrictions for the quality assurance agencies that conduct assessments in the Netherlands. Since our system of external quality assurance is based on the European Standards and Guidelines, it is, in our view, obvious that quality assurance agencies operating in the Netherlands should comply with the ESG as well, which does not seem to be the case at the moment. As a result, the question whether there is a level playing field for quality assurance agencies in the Netherlands is a legitimate one. QANU feels that the NVAO should more strongly see its role as that of a supervisor with a responsibility for the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands as a whole, but the NVAO is somewhat reluctant to accept this role, partly because the relevant legal framework does not offer any provisions for seriously playing such a role.¹¹
- Over the last few years, we have explicitly expressed as our opinion that all quality assurance agencies in the Netherlands (including QANU, of course – this is one of the main reasons that we apply for the focused review) may be expected to comply with the European Standards and Guidelines, if only because the whole system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands takes the ESG as its starting point. Until now, our plea has not been successful.

4.3.3. ESG 2.3 Implementing processes

No recommendations.

4.3.4. ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- Review panels that assess degree programmes always have a student member. This is actually a formal requirement, laid down in the law on higher education and scientific research. In addition, one of the requirements for the composition of a review panel used by the NVAO is that a review panel has international expertise. This requirement does not imply that every panel has a member from outside the Netherlands, but it does imply that every panel has a member with significant international experience. For practical reasons (the language used in the assessments of degree programmes is mostly Dutch), the panel member with international experience is quite often an expert from Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium.

¹¹ It is certainly true that the situation has improved since the introduction of *Accreditatie op maat* (Tailor-made accreditation), an amendment of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, that explicitly establishes restrictions for quality assurance agencies. It is now, for instance, no longer possible to appoint an employee of the agency that conducts an assessment as chair of the review panel. Similarly, a secretary of a review panel has to confirm his independence by signing the NVAO's form relating to confidentiality and independence. At the same time, it is still possible (i.e., its not explicitly forbidden) that a secretary of a review panel provides comments on a draft self-assessment report of a programme. Since QANU has always seen its role as a supporting one and considered the independence of the panel's secretary of crucial importance, the recent amendment did not have any consequences on QANU's approach and working methods.

- As described earlier in this document, panels that assess research units that offer a PhD programme will have a PhD student as a member as of early 2019. The institutions responsible for the Standard Evaluation Protocol, the protocol that serves as the starting point for research assessments, agreed to start a pilot to include a PhD student in such panels. The current version of the SEP is valid until 2021. In the preparations for the new version of the SEP, the institutions will evaluate the pilot and decide whether the inclusion of a PhD student will be included in the protocol and become a permanent requirement for the composition of these review panels. Although it is at this point in time not possible to refer to the outcomes of the pilot, it has become clear that the Minister of Education considers it important to include a student member, not in the least because this is required by the European Standards and Guidelines.

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

QANU's response:

- Our new Quality Handbook contains a detailed description of the process of convening a panel. It refers to separate documents that we use for specific parts of this process. It describes the requirements relating to independence. One of the documents referred to is the form that panel members have to sign to confirm their independence of the institution to be visited and the programmes to be assessed.

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

QANU's response:

- A few years ago, the NVAO took the initiative to develop a joint approach to the training of panel chairs together with the quality assurance agencies in the Netherlands. QANU was very much in favour of this co-operation and contributed actively to the development of the training. Unfortunately, this process did not progress very smoothly. QANU had questions about the profile of competences proposed by the NVAO and about the quality and the availability of the training materials developed by some of the other participants. In the meantime, QANU had developed a scheme for the training of chairs itself, which works well in practice. QANU considers it a real pity that the NVAO's attempts to develop a joint approach to the training of chairs were not very successful, but we will always be in favour of a stronger cooperation with the NVAO.

4.3.5. ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- The review panel's comment that QANU should guarantee a coherent and consistent use of frameworks touches the core of QANU's activities as a quality assurance agency. QANU finds it of crucial importance that review panels assess the programmes in a cluster in a consistent and coherent way, even though the panel may not have exactly the same composition for every single site visit. Prior to the site visits, QANU ensures consistency and coherence by training the

chair of the panel separately and by preparing the panel for the site visits in the preparatory kick-off meeting, in which we explain in detail how the assessment framework in general and the decision rules in particular should be interpreted. QANU's project managers have the task to monitor the application of the decision rules and thereby contribute to the consistency and coherence. To that end, they participate in the last session of every site within a cluster, in which the review panel phrases its assessment and its underpinning of the assessment. If necessary and if applicable, the project manager points out that the review panel gives a different weight to certain aspects of the programme than it did at previous site visits.

- Rather recently, QANU introduced a new method to further safeguard consistency and coherence: QANU now organises calibration sessions for cluster assessments in which the panel (or, in some cases, the core of the panel) looks back on the site visits that took place already and reflects on its own assessment and in particular on the questions whether its assessment is sufficiently consistent and coherent. We decided to introduce this method during the preparations for the assessment of the programmes in Law, the largest cluster of programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands (10 universities offer approximately 80 programmes). Since then, QANU has also applied this method to other cluster assessments. It is our experience that programmes appreciate this additional measure to strengthen the consistency and coherence very much.
- As mentioned earlier, QANU has recently formalised its quality assurance procedures. The Quality Handbook contains brief descriptions of these procedures, including a description of the calibration sessions. The Quality Handbook adopts an integrated approach, showing which procedures apply to specific phases within the process of assessment. It also provides links to separate documents that describe the procedures in a more detailed way. In our response to ESG 3.6, we describe the Quality Handbook in more detail.
- QANU agrees with the panel that the NVAO and other stakeholders also have important roles and responsibilities when it comes to monitoring and ensuring consistency and coherence.

4.3.6. ESG 2.6 Reporting

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

QANU's response:

- QANU agrees with the philosophy behind this recommendation: that a quality assurance agency should publish the reports it produces with a view to transparency and openness. In its meeting on 10 October 2018, QANU's Board nevertheless confirmed its decision to refrain from publishing reports on degree programmes assessed by QANU.
- QANU's Board has no objections against publishing the reports produced by review panels supported by QANU. It does, however, agree with the universities that these reports should not be published before the NVAO has come to a decision about the re-accreditation of a programme, because they are confidential until then. The reports QANU produces are essentially an advice to the NVAO. In accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines, the NVAO is required to publish the reports as appendices to its decisions.
- The reasons for refraining from publication are of a practical nature. As soon as the Board of the NVAO has taken a decision on the basis of a report produced by QANU, it informs the institution offering the programme in writing. The NVAO, however, does not immediately inform other relevant stakeholders as well, including the organisation that produced the report, a quality assurance agency such as QANU. The NVAO publishes its decisions and the reports these decisions are based on on its website, but it quite often does not do so immediately after the

Board has taken a decision. The NVAO's website does not contain regular news items or updates mentioning recent decisions taken by the Board.

- As a result, it is very difficult for QANU to determine whether a report can be published on its website because it has led to a decision by the NVAO. QANU would have to actively search the database of programmes available via the NVAO's website (which is not easily accessible). QANU and other quality assurance agencies have asked the NVAO several times to improve its information provision. QANU's Board agreed that it would take too much time and effort at the moment for QANU to keep track of the NVAO's decisions and accepted that this means that QANU will not publish the reports on degree programmes on its website.

4.3.7. ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Panel recommendation: *The review panel recommends QANU to reflect on the complaints and appeal procedure for the assessment of research units (incl. PhD programmes).*

QANU's response:

- Following the review panel's recommendation, QANU developed a new procedure for complaints and appeals that will be used both for assessments of degree programmes and assessments of research units. This procedure was discussed and approved by QANU's Board on 10 October 2018. The procedure is attached to this report as a separate document, cf. Appendix 4.
- QANU thoroughly revised the procedure for submitting appeals. The essence of the revised procedure is that institutions can submit an appeal against the assessment of one of their programmes or research units by a review panel supported by QANU. The appeal will be assessed by an independent Appeals Committee, installed by QANU's Board. This Appeals Committee has two permanent members, both of them legal experts with an academic background. In addition, QANU's Board will appoint a third member for every single appeal submitted. This third member will have expertise in the discipline covered by the degree programme or research unit. The Appeals Committee decides whether an appeal is justified and should be accepted. If this is the case, the Appeals Committee asks the review panel that assessed the programme or research unit to reconsider its assessment, taking into account the appeal submitted by the institution and the Appeals Committee's decision.
- In QANU's view, this procedure for submitting appeals has three strong and attractive characteristics. First, it ensures that an appeal is assessed by an independent group of experts who have no formal relation with QANU (apart from the fact that they have been appointed by QANU's Board) and are not involved in any way in QANU's governance. Second, the procedure does not affect the formal responsibility of review panels for the assessment of degree programmes and research units.¹² Third, the procedure guarantees that the Appeals Committee is able to also study appeals from the perspective of content and does not look at them exclusively from a formal or legal perspective.
- The essence of the procedure for submitting complaints is that anyone participating in an assessment supported by QANU can submit a complaint if he or she feels offended in any way by someone representing QANU, be it a project manager or secretary, a member of a panel supported by QANU, QANU's director or one of QANU's board members. Complaints relating to the behaviour of one of QANU's project managers or secretaries will be dealt with by QANU's director, complaints about the director's behaviour will be dealt with by the chair of QANU's

¹² According to the Dutch Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, it is a panel of independent experts approved by the NVAO that conducts an assessment. An Appeals Committee is not in a position to overrule such as assessment: that would be against the law. The Standard Evaluation Protocol does not have a legal status. It also assumes explicitly that an assessment is conducted by an assessment committee. The SEP does not refer to appeals at all.

Board, complaints about the board members will be dealt with by external and independent experts (for instance, the permanent members of the Appeals Committee). Both QANU's director and the chair of QANU's Board can also involve an external independent expert, depending on the character of the complaint. Complaints about members of review panels will be treated by the chair of QANU's Board and QANU's director.

- In its almost 15 years of existence, QANU has not received one single complaint. In our view, this is a confirmation that QANU's approach to assessments is considerate and respectful. We agree that it is nevertheless necessary for QANU to be prepared for complaints or appeals in the future and that QANU needs a procedure for such a case that will not do damage to our reputation, but instead confirm it. We feel that the new procedure we developed fulfils this need.

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

QANU's response:

- In its meeting on 10 October 2018, QANU's Board not only approved the new procedure for complaints and appeals, it also decided that this procedure will be published on QANU's website. At the time of writing, the procedure is available via ...

Suggestions for further development

Panel recommendation: *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.*

QANU's response:

- We do not believe that it is very likely that QANU will develop into a policy maker in the Dutch system of quality assurance in higher education that contributes in an official capacity to the further development of the system of external quality assurance. At the same time, we feel that our expertise and experience can be very useful for those who are responsible for the further development of the system of external quality assurance in higher education. As a result, we have to look for more informal ways to share our expertise and experience for the benefit of the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands.
- In the recent past, QANU has therefore been looking for ways to strengthen its relation with relevant stakeholders who have a formal role in the further development of the system. As mentioned earlier, QANU has recently managed to strengthen its relations with the Ministry of Education, with LSVB and ISO, the most important student organisations in the Netherlands, and with the Inspectorate of Education. QANU has partly been able to strengthen these relations by being pro-active, by contacting these important stakeholders actively and by raising issues that are relevant for the development of the system of external quality assurance. QANU is now actively cooperating with the student organisations. As an example, together with LSVB, ISO and NQA (Netherlands Quality Agency, a quality assurance agency that is also a member of ENQA), QANU is currently preparing an expert meeting aimed at students who participated in an assessment, either as a member of a panel or as a representative of a programme.
- QANU has been able to maintain its good relation with the universities and with the NVAO. The chair of the Board and the director, for instance, still have their annual meeting with the boards

of most of the universities. Until now, QANU does not have a systematic relation with employers, but QANU's board continues to look for ways to establish such a relation with this stakeholder as well.

- QANU aims at maintaining and further strengthening the improved relations with the stakeholders mentioned above and at finding new ways to share the outcomes of its assessments and thus deploying the expertise and experience gathered in the course of time to the system of external quality assurance in higher education in the Netherlands.

Appendices

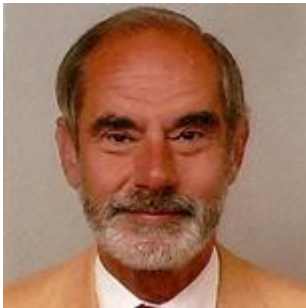
Appendix 1: List of board members and staff members (as of 1 January 2019)

Board members



Prof. dr. P.A.H. (Peter) van Lieshout (chair)

Studied Psychology and Philosophy in Utrecht Paris. Obtained a PhD in Social Philosophy in 1989 from Groningen University. Part-time Professor of Theory of Care at Utrecht University since 1992. Was Director of the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare, Director-General for Health Care at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, Project Director-General for Social Security and Care at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and a member of the Scientific Council for Government Policy.



Prof. dr. J.W. (Jaap) Zwemmer (vice-chairman, treasurer)

Is retired professor of Tax Law at the University of Amsterdam. Studied Notarial Law and Fiscal Law at this university and received his PhD in 1975. Has been dean of the Law Faculty and the Faculty of Economics of the University of Amsterdam and member of the Advisory Board of the AMC/UvA. Was interim-rector magnificus of the University of Amsterdam in 2007 and was interim-dean of the Academic Centre of Dentistry Amsterdam (ACTA) in 2008/2009. Is a member of the Royal Academy of Science (KNAW).



Prof. dr. ir. G.M.A. (Guy) Aelterman

Emeritus professor Food Technology, University of Ghent. Former Head of office at the Flemish Ministry of Education. Previously among others Vice Chancellor of Artesis University College Antwerp, Executive Board Member and Vice-President of the NVAO (the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), Vice Chancellor of and professor at the University College Ghent.



Prof. dr. A.C. (Arie) Nieuwenhuijzen Kruseman

Emeritus professor in internal medicine at the Maastricht University Medical Centre. Was dean of the Faculty of Medicine and rector magnificus at the same university and president of the Royal Dutch Medical Association (KNMG). He is chair of Nuffic's Board of Trustees, member of the review committee for higher education and research, chair of the Board of Trustees of Stichting Elisabeth Strouven and member of the Board of Trustees at the Stichting Gezondheidscentra Eindhoven.



Drs. P.M.M. (Paul) Rullmann

Studied sociology at VU University Amsterdam. Worked a.o. for the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and for the Hogeschool Haarlem, where he became a member of the Executive Board in 2000. Moved to Delft University of Technology in May 2002, where he became a member of the Executive Board, responsible for Education and Operational Management. He retired from his position at Delft University of Technology in March 2013. Currently a.o. chair of the CDHO (Committee for the Efficiency of Higher Education) and DUWO (student housing corporation).



J.S.M. (Josephine) Verstappen MA

Josephine Verstappen studied Educational Sciences in Utrecht and at the University of Amsterdam. She completed an excellence programme at the University of Utrecht and a pre-master programme in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. She worked for the Dutch Student Union (LSVB) and was also member of the board of the LSBV. She currently works as policy advisor for the Erasmus University Rotterdam. As a board member, she was nominated by the Dutch student organisations.



Prof. dr. G.C. (Gerry) Wakker

Studied Classics at the University of Amsterdam and obtained her PhD in 1994. Is Professor of Ancient Greek Linguistics at the University of Groningen. Since March 2003 she is a member of the board of the Faculty of Arts, since July 2009 she is dean of the Faculty with research as her prime responsibility. She has extensive experience with assessments and (re)accreditation. Was a member of various international assessment committees (Salzburg, Brussel, Ghent).

Staff members

Director



Sietze Looijenga is director of QANU since 1 September 2012. He studied Dutch language and literature at the University of Groningen and held different positions in that university. As of March 1999, he worked at the Free University of Berlin as manager of the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages, a project funded by the European Commission. As of November 2001, he worked as head of ICT for the Language Centre of the University of Ghent. In March 2003 he joined the VSNU as project leader for quality assurance. In 2004, he moved to QANU, that took over the quality assurance activities from the VSNU. As of January 2008, he worked as policy advisor education for the University of Utrecht. In November 2008, he returned to QANU.

Project managers



Trees Graas studied History at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. After obtaining her master's in Modern History, she worked as a study advisor at the Faculty of Arts of the VU Amsterdam and as a team manager of a curriculum project for the same faculty. She was also involved in a number of small-scale research projects. Then she spent several years as a study advisor and education coordinator for the Philosophy and Theology Faculties of the VU Amsterdam. Since November 2009 she has been a project leader at QANU.



Peter Hildering studied Applied Physics at the University of Twente and received his master's degree in Physics and Astronomy at the Radboud University. He specialized in Science Communication. During and after his time at the university he was active as a freelance science journalist for various magazines and as head of the Communication department at NWO institute Centrum Wiskunde & Informatica (CWI) in Amsterdam. At QANU, Peter Hildering is mainly responsible for the assessment of the degree and research programmes in the exact, technical and natural sciences.



Marijn Hollestelle studied Physics and History and Philosophy of Science at Utrecht University and obtained his PhD in 2011 at Leiden University for his biography of physicist Paul Ehrenfest. He then worked as a researcher at the Foundation for the History of Technology at Eindhoven University of Technology. He did research for the Rathenau Instituut and worked for six years as a programme manager at the Science domain of NWO. At QANU, he is involved in various programme assessments, including Biomedical Engineering, Building Sciences and Architecture and the cluster Physics and Astronomy.



Petra van den Hoorn is involved in the assessment of the degree programmes in the clusters Biomedical Technology and Arts & Culture. Previously she worked as a researcher and program coordinator at the department of Teacher Education at the University of Groningen. She was responsible for collecting data of several thousand beginning teachers in secondary education in The Netherlands and worked at varied research questions concerning professional development of beginning teachers. She studied Work, Organizational and Personnel Psychology at the University of Groningen.



Alexandra Paffen studied Culture and Sciences at Maastricht University (UM). She finished her PhD in 2007 on the exile of Erika and Klaus Mann at the University of Utrecht (UU). She gave courses and lectures at different Dutch universities. Before joining QANU she worked as a study advisor and project manager at the University of Amsterdam (UvA).



Fiona Schouten studied Language and Culture Studies at Utrecht University and obtained a PhD in Spanish Literature from Radboud University Nijmegen in 2009. Her thesis deals with the memory of francoism in recent Spanish novels. She then became director of research and policy at the Nexus Institute in Tilburg, where she was editor of the journal Nexus as well as founder and coordinator of the Nexus Connect youth association. She began working as a QANU project coordinator in September 2015.



Els Schröder studied History at Utrecht University and completed a PhD in Medieval Studies at the University of York. In her thesis, she researched friendship and favour in late Anglo-Saxon England. During her years in York, she taught in the History department and was actively involved in redesigning its undergraduate curriculum. Els worked at Brepols Publishers in Turnhout, as student coach at Studiemeesters in Amsterdam and was managing editor and director research and policy at the Nexus Institute in Tilburg. Since May 2016, she is project manager for QANU. She also works part time as museum guide and teacher in the National Museum for Education in Dordrecht.



Anna Sparreboom is QANU's coordinator of research assessments. She is also project manager for both research assessments and assessments of degree programmes. Before joining QANU, she was a junior lecturer and PhD candidate in Ancient History at the University of Amsterdam. In her dissertation she investigated the social function and cultural significance of hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa. During her years as a PhD candidate, she organized two international conferences and a PhD masterclass in Rome for the national research school. Anna lived in Leuven (Belgium) from 2014-2016, where she worked as a language trainer Dutch for expats and francophone professionals.



Anke van Wier is project manager at QANU. She is involved with the projects Clinical Technology, Archaeology, Dentistry and Criminology. Previously she worked as a lecturer at the bachelor programme of European Studies at Maastricht University. There she was also involved in the programme committee and part of an advisory committee for student evaluations of teaching. Anke has a BA in International Relations from the University of Groningen and an MA in European Studies from Maastricht University. She lives in Utrecht, does CrossFit and likes camping and hiking.

Assistant project managers



Jaïra Azaria studied Middle-Eastern Studies at Leiden University and completed her master's degree in Istanbul. After graduation she held various positions at Leiden University Fund and Erasmus University Rotterdam. As an assistant project manager, Jaïra supports the project managers with various tasks, of which the panel composition is her main task. In her spare time she likes to work with her hands; she is an enthusiastic ceramist, teaches children how to draw and loves to try out new recipes in the kitchen. If the weather permits she enjoys long walks in nature.



Valérie Drost holds an MSc in Health and Social Psychology, an MSc in Health Education and Promotion, and a BSc in Health Sciences, which she obtained at Maastricht University. Valérie previously worked as a researcher and project coordinator at EDLAB, the Maastricht University institute for education innovation. Since October 2018, she holds a position as assistant project manager at QANU.



Marcella van Schie holds a BA in History from the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and a MA in Public History from the University of Amsterdam. She has worked at the Amstelland public library; as a tour guide in the UK for SRC Cultuurvakanties; and as assistant project manager at translation agency Concorde. In 2015 she completed a course in Information Management and has worked as advisor for several companies. She works for QANU as assistant project manager since December 2016.

Operational management



Sanderijn de Vries started her career as project officer at the Transitional Arrangements Board of Psychologists (ROG). Then she became assistant-manager for operational management of the Private Law Section of the Jurisprudence Faculty of the University of Utrecht. After a short interruption in her career to study, she started working as a staff officer at the office of the European Network of Occupational Therapy of the University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam. Since 2006 she has been employed by QANU. On 1 September 2008 she became operational management coordinator.



Heleen Faas works as an operational assistant, and in this role she supports the entire internal organization of QANU. In 1994 she graduated from the Conservatory of Hilversum, which has merged since 1998 with the Sweelinck to the Conservatorium of Amsterdam. Her choice of study proved to be a good stepping stone to a diverse career. From tour manager for international opera and dance companies, to management assistant at the Publieke Omroep, to various other supporting roles for organizations and companies. She likes to visit theatre, cycling and tennis in her spare time in addition to the her volunteer work.

Secretariat

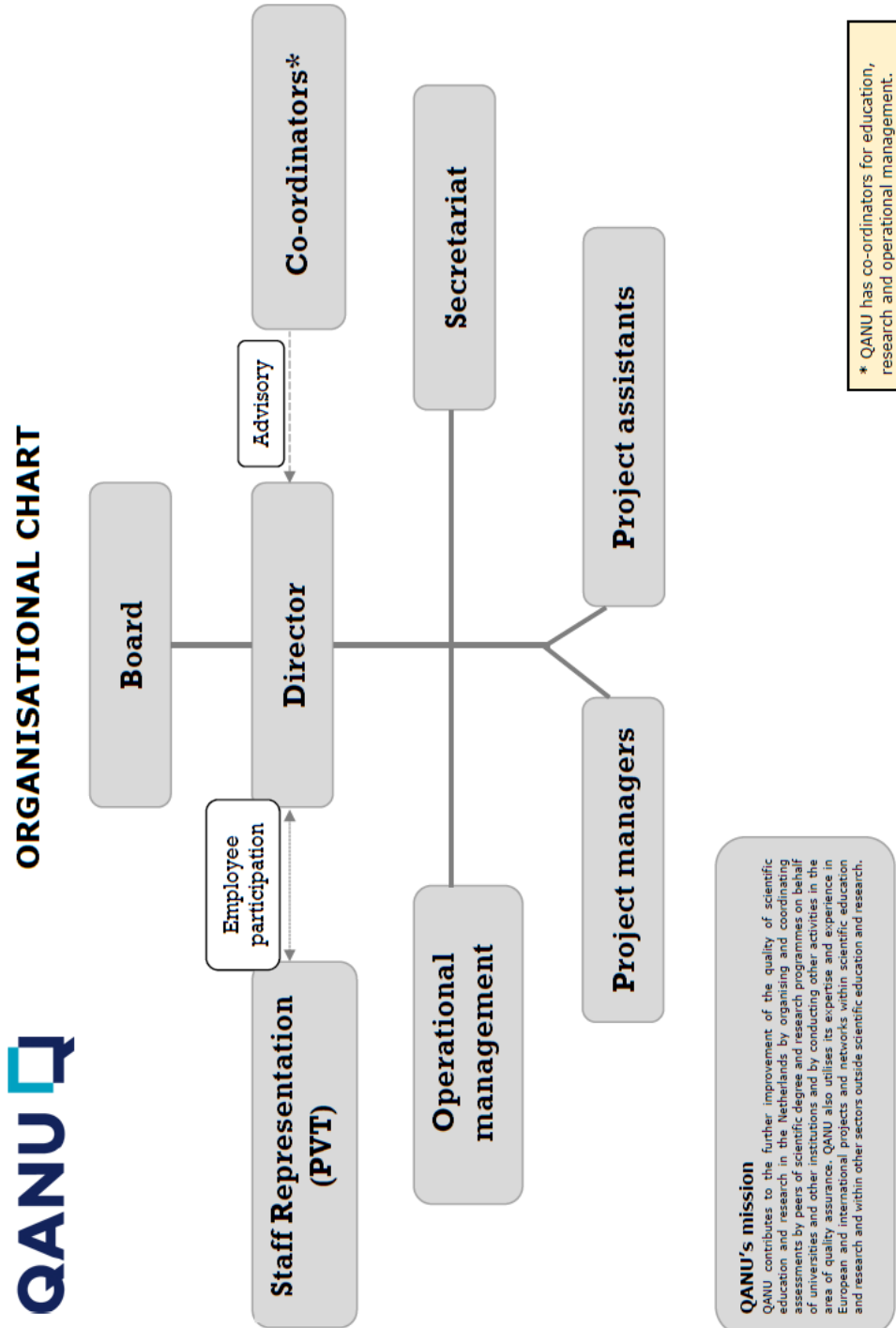


Yvet van Eersel works as office manager for QANU since 1 August 2018. She provides the necessary secretarial support for QANU's Board and staff. Yvet completed a specialised training course for secretaries offered by Schoevers Institute. Since then, she worked for different organisations in a variety of sectors. She lives in Woerden. In her spare time, she likes to be creative and she likes camping with her husband and children.

Appendix 2: NVAO's Assessment frameworks (September 2016 and September 2018) and Standard Evaluation Protocol 2015-2021.

Attached as separate documents. At the time of writing, the new assessment framework has no formal status yet. It is supposed to take effect as of 1 February 2019. There is no English version of the new assessment framework yet.

Appendix 3: QANU's organisational chart



Version: 26 November 2018

Appendix 4: Procedure for complaints and appeals for assessments of degree programmes and research units supported by QANU

Procedure for complaints and appeals for assessments of degree programmes and research units supported by QANU



QANU / version 1.0, 26 November 2018 / SL

Procedure for complaints for assessments supported by QANU

This document describes the procedure used by QANU for filing complaints about QANU's working methods as a quality assurance agency, or about the behaviour of individuals representing QANU or of members of panels supported by QANU.

A complaint can be filed by someone who is dissatisfied about the way he or she is treated during an assessment by someone representing QANU, either an employee of QANU or a board member of QANU, or by a member of a panel supported by QANU.

It is not possible to file a complaint against an assessment by a panel supported by QANU. It is possible to submit an appeal against such an assessment. QANU has a separate procedure for submitting appeals (cf. the next chapter of this document). Only institutions can submit an appeal on behalf of degree programmes or research units against the assessments of a panel supported by QANU.

Complaints about QANU's working methods or the behaviour of individuals representing QANU or of members of panels supported by QANU can be filed by means of the notification form below. Someone who files a complaint, receives a confirmation of receipt of the notification immediately.

QANU informs the person filing the complaint within 5 working days how the complaint will be treated. The term for treating a complaint is in principle 15 working days. When more time is needed for a careful handling of the complaint, QANU will inform the person who filed the complaint.

A complaint about the behaviour of a staff member of QANU will in principle be treated by QANU's director. A complaint about the behaviour of QANU's director will in principle be treated by the chair of QANU's Board. A complaint about the behaviour of one of QANU's Board members will in principle be treated by QANU's Appeals Committee. A complaint about a member of a review panel supported by QANU will in principle be treated by QANU's director in consultation with the chair of QANU's Board. Complaints about QANU's working methods will in principle be treated by the chair of QANU's Board and QANU's director. It is, depending on the nature and character of the complaint, always possible to involve others in the handling of the complaint.

Notification form

I wish to file a complaint.

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Degree programme /
research unit: _____

Institution: _____

Assessment to which
complaint relates: _____

Role in assessment _____

The complaint relates to:

- The behaviour of a staff member of QANU
- The behaviour of the director of QANU
- The behaviour of a member of the Board of QANU
- The behaviour of a member of a review panel supported by QANU
- QANU's working methods

Description of the complaint:

Documentation to substantiate the complaint:

Please attach documents to substantiate the complaint if desired.

Procedure for appeal for assessments supported by QANU

Article 1: Submitting an appeal

1. If an institution, after it has had the opportunity to respond to the draft version of an assessment report, still cannot agree with an assessment of a review panel (in what follows: the Panel) about a degree programme or a research unit, it can submit an appeal against the assessment. The appeal will be treated by QANU's Appeals Committee.
2. The Appeals Committee is an independent committee that has three members: two permanent members and a third member who has expertise in the discipline covered by the degree programme or the research unit. The members of the Appeals Committee are appointed by QANU's Board. They decide without obligation or compulsion.

Article 2: Grounds of appeal

1. Institutions may, within the scope of the appeal outlined in Article 3, appeal against an assessment of the Panel about a degree programme or a research unit, claiming that
 - a. the Panel has violated the starting points or guidelines for assessing a degree programme or research unit, general legislation or any commonly accepted principles of fair and equal procedures; or
 - b. the Panel's assessment was unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence, for example in that the Panel has
 - i. not considered or misunderstood certain facts and/or evidence duly provided in the assessment process; or
 - ii. based its assessment on facts and/or evidence which were not duly provided in the proceedings; or
 - iii. based its decision on considerations which are evidently not substantially related to the issues in question, or
 - iv. failed to consider an aspect which is likely to be of substantial relevance for the assessment.

Article 3: Scope of appeal

1. The appeal may only be based on those facts and/or evidence which have been duly introduced into the assessment procedure and shall clearly state the grounds for appeal.
2. The relevant assessment framework is the version that was valid at the time the Panel formulated its assessment.
3. Except in case of grave and evident fault, the Appeals Committee will only consider those complaints which the applicant has put forward in the appeal.

Article 4: Appeals procedure

1. An appeal shall be submitted to QANU within 60 days after the institution received the final version of the assessment report.

2. The Appeals Committee should consider an appeal within 90 days from receipt of the appeal. The appeal shall be forwarded to the Panel for comment before a decision is made. The term of 90 days can be extended once with a maximum of 90 days.
3. In case of lack of relevant information or need for clarification, the Appeals Committee may request further information from the Panel or the secretary of the Panel. The Appeals Committee may, if appropriate, request further information from the institution submitting the appeal.

Article 5: Decisions and consequences

1. The Appeals Committee shall decide to either accept the appeal, reject the appeal, or deem it inadmissible. The institution that submitted the appeal and the Panel shall be notified of the decision and its grounds.
2. If the appeal is accepted, the Panel shall reconsider its assessment, taking due account of the appeal and the decision of the Appeals Committee.
3. If the appeal is rejected, the Panel's assessment is final.

Article 6: Independence

1. A member of the Appeals Committee who has a conflict of interest with regard to an institution may not take part in the consideration of an appeal submitted by that institution. A member of the Appeals Committee is assumed to have a conflict of interest if, for example,
 - a. s/he receives financial compensation from the institution as employee, consultant, freelancer or otherwise, or
 - b. s/he holds a position, whether paid or unpaid, with the institution, for example as a member of a committee or a board, or
 - c. s/he was involved in the assessment of the institution or a degree programme or research unit of the institution, or
 - d. any of the above applies to a close relative or personal relation of the person, or
 - e. any of the above applied within the last five years.
2. A member of the Appeals Committee is expected to declare a possible conflict of interest of his/her own accord.
3. Institutions submitting an appeal shall notify the chair of the Board of QANU if they consider that a member of the Appeals Committee has a conflict of interest with regard to their appeal.
4. Any disputes with regard to the independence of the members of the Appeals Committee shall be settled by the chair of the Board of QANU in consultation with the chair of the Appeals Committee.

Article 7: Further provisions

The Appeals Committee may specify the process further in its own Guideline for Appeals Procedures.

Appendix 5: Policy for analysing and sharing outcomes of assessments supported by QANU

Policy for analysing and sharing outcomes of assessments supported by QANU



QANU / version 1.0, 9 October 2018 / SL

Introduction

During its assessments of degree programmes and research units, QANU acquires a lot of information that is useful and interesting at a higher aggregation level than that of individual assessments. This information can, for instance, be used for making analyses describing developments in higher education and scientific research in general and in the (external) quality assurance in these sectors in particular. These analyses can provide a contribution to the reflection on and the further development of the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands. This is, of course, only possible when QANU makes these analyses public or distributes them in a systematic way among relevant stakeholders.

QANU intends to analyse the general outcomes from assessments of degree programmes and research units in a more systematic way and to utilize the conclusions from these analyses in a more systematic way, i.e., to enter them into the discussions about the further development of the accreditation system. QANU has the ambition to share the general outcomes in a more structured way with the various stakeholders in the field of internal and external quality assurance in the Netherlands and beyond. In QANU's view, these stakeholders include:

- the institutions of higher education (research universities and universities of applied science),
- the students at these institutions,
- the teachers and researchers at these institutions,
- other staff members at these institutions (for instance, policy advisors responsible for quality assurance),
- the relevant umbrella organizations of institutions (VSNU, Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences),
- the relevant student organizations (LSVB, ISO),
- the institutions that have a formal role in the system of external quality assurance (NVAO, the Ministry of Education, the Inspectorate of Education),
- the quality assurance agencies in the Netherlands.

QANU has therefore developed a policy to analyse and share the general outcomes from the assessments supported by QANU in a more systematic way.

Activities undertaken in the past

In recent years, QANU has distributed and shared the analyses based on the general outcomes of assessments in various ways.

- in short articles that elaborate on a specific aspect of assessments (for example, articles about testing and assessment or about a new approach to reduce the administrative burden that is associated with assessments). These articles are based on QANU's years of experience with assessments, they use the findings and conclusions of the panels and the secretaries involved in these visitations. In most cases they are not merely inventorying or exploratory, but also synthesising and opinion-forming;
- in policy papers on specific aspects of the external quality assurance system that are distributed on a limited scale and specifically among stakeholders who play a role in or are closely involved with that system (for example, a memorandum in which QANU presents its ideas about increasing the efficiency of the accreditation system and about strengthening the reliability of the evaluations of panels). The purpose of these policy papers is to inform stakeholders in the process of further development of the accreditation system and to sometimes change their minds. For example, in a policy paper produced in late 2014, QANU already advocated a binary assessment scale instead of a differentiated one. This proposal has since then received more and more support and is now legally anchored as a result of the recent introduction of the bill *Accreditatie op maat* (Tailor-made accreditation);

- during expert meetings, meetings in which experts highlight an aspect of assessments from different perspectives and try to arrive at general conclusions and recommendations that can contribute to the further development of the external quality assurance system. The starting point for such an expert meeting is a statement or hypothesis that QANU has developed on the basis of the outcomes of the assessments and that QANU would like to elaborate with a group of experts to develop it further. For example, QANU organized an expert meeting in 2015 that essentially dealt with the advantages and disadvantages of differentiated assessments. The meeting had a clear outcome: a binary rating scale is preferable to a differentiated one;
- in state of the art reports, reports in which a review panel supported by QANU that has assessed a cluster of degree programmes, establishes its overall findings. These state of the art reports are only produced when clusters of degree programmes explicitly ask for it, something that they certainly do not do by default. The reports have a strong substantive approach and rely heavily on the input from the members of the panel that conducted the assessment. In most cases they also deal with non-content developments within a discipline. QANU publishes these reports in principle on its website, but only when the institutions that participated in the assessment explicitly agree and only after the NVAO has published its decisions on the re-accreditation of the assessed programmes;
- in consultation with the Executive Boards of institutions and with relevant institutions dealing with external quality assurance, such as the NVAO, the VSNU, OCW and the Inspectorate of Education. In the consultations, the Executive Boards often ask for the general impressions QANU has of the quality and quality assurance within the institution. This concerns analyses that exceed the level of individual degree programmes, but not the level of institutions.

It should be noted is that some of the activities that QANU undertakes in the context of knowledge sharing and knowledge development do not lead to publications that are available for every interested party.

- The articles on specific aspects of assessments are published and are therefore generally accessible.
- The policy papers have so far not been published, but distributed in a systematic way, i.e., sent to persons or institutions that have an interest in the subject of the paper.
- The expert meetings are only accessible to invitees. The results have not been published to date.
- The state of the art reports are published in principle, but only after the NVAO has taken decisions about the re-accreditation of the programmes from the cluster.
- The general impressions QANU has of the quality and quality assurance of the degree programmes of a specific institution are not made public.

In the case of state of the art reports, QANU fully understands that institutions do not want QANU to publish such a report on its website before the NVAO has finalized the decisions about the programmes from the cluster concerned and has published these decisions on its website. Consultations with the Executive Boards are confidential, the matters that are discussed are usually not suitable for publication.

Policy for the future

QANU is convinced that the general outcomes of QANU's assessments are useful, interesting and relevant and aims to share these outcomes to a greater extent than has been the case until now.

The basis for the policy that QANU intends to use with regard to the analysis and sharing of outcomes of the assessments lies in the ESG, the European Standards and Guidelines, which form the starting point for the system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands, at least for the accreditation system, of which QANU's assessments of degree programmes are an important part. One of the standards of the ESG, Standard 3.4, Thematic analysis, deals with the sharing of general outcomes of assessments and states:

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

QANU endorses the principle that quality assurance agencies should in principle regularly share knowledge resulting from the general outcomes of the assessments they have conducted. QANU wants to make sure that the general outcomes from QANU's assessments are available on a larger scale than is currently the case. For this purpose, QANU sets itself the following goals:

- QANU will continue to produce short articles about aspects of assessments that are based on the knowledge and experience acquired by QANU's project managers. In doing that, QANU intends to select current themes. The articles can be of an inventory or exploratory character, but they can also provide a synthesis or an opinion. QANU aims at producing at least one article every two years that is published.
- QANU will continue to write policy papers on current topics that are related to and fit within the discussion about the further development of the accreditation system. QANU will continue to distribute these papers, but will also publish them on its website. QANU aims at producing at least one policy paper every two years.
- QANU will continue to organize expert meetings periodically. The themes for these meetings are taken from the assessments that QANU carries out. QANU will make reports of these meetings, publish them on its website and possibly distribute them. QANU aims at organizing an expert meeting on a current topic once every two years and to publish the results.
- QANU wants to continue to publish state of the art reports, but it is dependent on the wishes and preferences of the degree programmes that do not always appreciate such a report. QANU is not able to produce a state of the art report independently, without the help and input of panel members, because of the substantive character of such a report. The number of state of the art reports will not be predictable, partly because the number of assessments that QANU conducts varies considerably per year due to the problem of the peaks and valleys in the assessment grid.
- QANU sees no possibilities to share the general analyses of the quality and quality assurance of institutions. The information that comes up during the discussions with the Executive Boards is often too specific and not suitable for further dissemination.

QANU has no ambitions to carry out system-wide analyses, analyses of the system of external quality assurance as a whole, because QANU conducts only a part of the assessments (and only assessments of degree programmes offered by universities) and, as a consequence, does not have a complete overview of developments within assessments. QANU will therefore restrict itself to specific aspects of assessments, to themes that are topical, that are dealt with in the discussions about the accreditation system.

QANU intends to more strongly use the quiet periods (the valleys in the assessment schedule, in which QANU will conduct far less assessments of degree programmes than in the busy periods) to analyse the general outcomes of the assessments conducted and to make the outcomes of these analyses publicly available.

Conclusion

QANU is convinced that QANU, as a result of a more structured and systematic approach, will succeed more successfully in sharing useful and interesting general outcomes of assessments with other stakeholders. QANU will evaluate the aims laid down in this document periodically and update them when necessary. QANU assumes that there will be years in which it will be more difficult to achieve the aims, but that there will also be years in which the aims will be exceeded (as a result of the uneven distribution of assessments of degree programmes over time).

Appendix 6: Revised Article 5 of QANU's statutes

Article 5: Composition of the Board

1. The Board of the Foundation consists of at least three and at most seven members. The majority of the board members consists of persons with proven managerial experience and / or experience in the field of evaluating academic degree programmes and research units and / or knowledge of and experience with societal sectors in which graduates of academic degree programmes find employment. The board members are appointed by the Board for a period of three years and can be reappointed twice after the end of their term. In the appointment decision the quality is stated which constitutes the basis for the appointment. The Board ensures that all the aforementioned knowledge and experience is present within the Board.
2. One of the board members is appointed on the recommendation of student organizations. This board member is appointed by the Board for a period of two years and cannot be reappointed.
3. Board membership is incompatible with the performance of a management function at a university or academic hospital in the Netherlands.
4. The board elects from among its members a chairman, a deputy chairman and a treasurer.
5. If, for whatever reason, one or more members of the Board are absent, then the remaining board members, or the only remaining board member, nevertheless constitute a legal Board.

[translated by SL]