



Vlaamse universiteiten en hogescholen raad

ENQA
Mr. Pdraig Walsh
President
Tervurenlaan 36/38 bus 4
1040 Brussel

contactpersoon

Klara de Wilde
Klara.dewilde@vluhr.be

uw kenmerk

ons kenmerk

KDW/2016-144

datum

2016-10-17

Follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report of VLUHR QA

Dear President

As requested in your letter of 26 October 2014, you will find in annex the follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report.

As we explained earlier in our letters of 23 March 2015 and 8 July 2015, the quality assurance system in Flemish higher education has changed. All institutions will undergo an institutional review which is complemented with a review of the way the institutions coordinate the quality assurance of study programmes. In this option, NVAO has automatically extended the accreditation of study programmes with 8 years, with exception of the accreditation of new study programmes, study programmes in international collaboration, study programmes of registered institutions and the study programmes with a negative or temporarily accreditation. We keep you informed on future developments within VLUHR QA. For further information you can always contact us.

Best regards

Nik Heerens

Annex: Follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report of VLUHR QA

adres

Ravensteingalerij 27
bus 3 & 6, 1^e verdieping
B-1000 Brussel

telefoon

+32 (0)2 792 55 00

fax

+32 (0)2 211 41 99

website

www.vluhr.be

Follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report of VLUHR QA

ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)

Standard: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Panel judgement: Fully compliant

“...Whilst the VLUHR QA teams were operating in an overall satisfactory way at present, the Panel noted that recent budget cuts had reduced their number by one member. The Panel considered that the VLUHR QA teams were now operating at a knife-edge in terms of ensuring sufficient educational expertise was available for the review.”

Panel Recommendations:

That VLUHR QA keep under close review with their funders the operation of the subject Panels in terms of their strength and depth, their training and overall capacity to undertake their designated role.

Follow-up October 2016

As mentioned in our manual for QA in Flemish higher education, institutions can nominate reviewers as part of the first phase of the assessment panel selection. The institutions suggest names of potential chairs and panel members with subject-level expertise, pedagogical/educational expertise, audit and quality assurance expertise, international expertise and professional experience. In a second phase the chair and the project leader of VLUHR QA composes the review panel, in which all these five areas of expertise must be covered. In addition, the following specific criteria are applied for all panel members:

- Credibility of the expert in the academic community;
- Absence of any conflict of interest with the institution under review;
- Ability to integrate with the activities of the expert group.

Each panel must also include a student as full member.

Furthermore the composition procedure of all review panels is subject to two final checks and balances:

- The expertise of the panel members is presented to the NVAO for advice;
- The initial list of candidates as well as the final panel composition are presented to the QA Board for approval;.

It is also worth mentioning that in the latest meeting between NVAO and VLUHR QA, NVAO announced they intend to tighten the condition to meet the criteria for educational expertise in Flanders and the Netherlands, to ensure that the panel has sufficient expertise for their designated role.

ESG 2.6 Follow-up-procedures (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)

Standard: Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Panel judgement: Substantially compliant

“...57. The Panel reviewed the effectiveness of the monitoring of the action plans and discussed it with external representatives; despite the split responsibilities for the effective monitoring of follow-up, it believes that monitoring overall is effectively carried out. It would recommend however that the role of VLUHR QA should become more central to the process as the recipient of follow-up reports.”

Panel Recommendations:

That the responsible Flemish bodies consider whether full responsibility for consideration of follow-up reports should rest primarily with VLUHR QA as part of a more structured and transparent process.

Follow-up October 2016

Review reports always contain a scoring table and a chapter with recommendations. When a study programme receives a score 'not sufficient' for a standard, it can obtain an accreditation for a limited period on the condition that the study programme presents a convincing recovery plan. Before the end of the recovery period the study programme has to undergo a new review, organized by VLUHR QA.

At several occasions in the past, VLUHR QA discussed the desirability of additional follow-up measures for all study programs with representatives of Flemish higher education institutions. The higher education institutions have clearly indicated they don't see a need for additional follow-up by VLUHR QA. A change of attitude is not likely at present, given the recent change in QA in higher education (decree of June 2015) that shifts the responsibility of the (external) QA of the vast majority of study programmes entirely to the institutions.

However, discussions concerning publicly available information of the quality of study programmes as well as appropriate follow-up of quality assurance activities on the level of study programmes in the new system is ongoing.

ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)

Standard: Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Panel judgement: Partially compliant

Panel Recommendations:

- That VLUHR QA consider how the outputs from its review activities can be further focused to support system-wide analysis and institutional quality improvement and enhancement.
- The Panel recognises the constraints currently faced by the Agency through significant financial pressures and the volume of procedure-driven activity. However, it is recommended that, to fully realise its potential, the Agency discuss with its stakeholders options to increase its resources for this purpose. The additional resource thus gained could then be directed to increase the volume of system-wide analysis and quality enhancement activity which VLUHR QA can undertake.

Follow-up October 2016

In the former QA system, VLUHR QA organized the review of clusters of (similar or related) study programs within the same project. The "cluster reports" included a separate chapter presenting the comparative analysis of the assessed programmes. Moreover common issues arising from the assessments were reported. Given the change of the QA system and the shift of the responsibility of the (external) QA of the study programmes to the HE institutions themselves, each institution decides independently the timeframe and the standards for the reviews of its study programmes. It is a challenge to organize a system wide analysis in the present QA system. This ongoing discussion is related to the discussion concerning the publicly available information and the follow-up of the quality of study programmes. Nevertheless, VLUHR QA continues to undertake research in relation to Flemish QA, as it has done in the past (inter alia as contribution to the European Quality Fora) and plans an overall analysis of the assessed study programmes by 2018.

ESG 3.3 Activities (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)

Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Panel judgement: Fully compliant

Panel Recommendation:

The Panel would urge the Agency to position itself at the centre of the debate on future approaches to QA; in the Panel's view, the Agency has much to offer the sector through its accumulated expertise, sector knowledge and accumulated institutional performance data. VLUHR QA operates a comprehensive and complex set of external quality assurance procedures at the programme level and a new institutional review method is being rolled out. It is open for discussion as to whether the combined weight of these procedures is really the optimum mechanism for the maintenance and enhancement of quality in Flemish HE. It is under discussion as to whether programme-level and institutional-level accreditation may in future be merged into a single process. It is recommended that VLUHR QA position itself in the centre of this debate with Government and HE stakeholders; it has much valuable experience and insight to offer in the debate.

Follow-up October 2016

As we explained in our letter of 8 July 2015 the Flemish government approved the decree-change for the re-organization of the external quality assurance system in Flanders. HE institutions have a choice between two options:

- Option A: a combination of institutional review and study programme assessments (present system). Both review and assessment follow the present legal system (Higher Education Codex);

or

- Option B: an extended institutional review. The institutional review is extended with a review of the way the institution coordinates the quality assurance of its study programmes. In this option, NVAO has automatically extended the accreditation of study programmes with 8 years (with exception of the accreditation of new study programmes, study programmes in international collaboration, study programme of registered institutions and those study programmes that received a negative or temporary accreditation).

All institutions have chosen for the extended institutional review (option B).

The development of this new system of external QA has been lead by the Flemish government in close collaboration with NVAO and the representatives of HE institutions. The involvement of VLUHR QA (and other stakeholders) in this process has regrettably been minimal. An evaluation of the current QA system is scheduled for 2018. VLUHR QA has requested to be part of the evaluation committee which counts representatives of the Minister, administration, HE institutions, students and NVAO.

ESG 3.4 Resources (ENQA Criterion 3)

Standard: Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process (es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures (and staff) (Addition by ENQA for ENQA criterion)

Panel judgement: Substantially compliant

Panel Recommendation:

That the full merger of staff into the new organisation be completed as soon as possible.

Follow-up October 2016

The merger of the staff into VLUHR QA was completed by October 2014.

ESG 3.6 Independence (ENQA Criterion 5)

Standard: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Panel judgement: Substantially compliant

Panel Recommendation:

That VLUHR QA consider a strengthening in the involvement of students and representatives of industry and professional bodies in its governance arrangements. Its stakeholder profile outside the higher education sector is limited.

Follow-up October 2016

The change in the system of QA of Flemish higher education has had considerable impact on the activities of VLUHR QA. In future, the assessments to be undertaken by VLUHR QA are limited to new study programmes, study programmes in international collaboration, study programmes of registered institutions and those study programmes with a negative or temporary accreditation. Besides these (statutory) assessments, VLUHR QA continues to develop more activities in the field of quality assurance within or outside the higher education area. At present, we are installing a new QA Board. We plan to install an Advisory committee of which the composition will be representative for the variety of activities.
