



AVEPRO

ESG 2015:  
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GUIDELINES  
AMONG EUROPEAN QA AGENCIES

DATA UPDATED AS OF 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2016



## **Introduction**

- 1.1 The ESG 2015 and the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance/AAQ**
- 1.1.1 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the “Institutional accreditation – documentation 01.01.2016”**
- 2.1 The ESG 2015 and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders/NVAO**
- 2.1.1 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the “Framework for institutional reviews – Flanders 2015-2017”**
- 2.1.2 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the “Quality Code - Flanders 2015-2017”**

## **Annex 1**

## **Annex 2**

## **Introduction**

The revised version of the *European Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area/ESG* was approved during the Conference of Ministers held in Yerevan in May 2015.

The ESG 2015 contain some innovations in relation to the previous version. Above all, they take into consideration the developments capable of influencing quality assurance that have taken place in the context of the EHEA/European Higher Education Area since 2005, i.e.:

- The move towards student-centred learning
- The need for flexible learning pathways
- The recognition of competences acquired outside the institutional education system
- The increasing internationalization of education
- The spread of digital learning
- New forms of course attendance
- National frameworks and EQF of qualifications
- ECTS
- diploma supplement

The ESG apply to all higher education available within the EHEA, whatever mode of study or place of teaching, and therefore also refer to transnational and cross-border higher education. It is also specified that the term “programme” refers to higher education in a broad sense, including education that does not lead to a formal qualification.



The ESG 2015 focus on quality assurance in relation to teaching and study (as did the previous version of the ESG), but specifically add that they also refer to “the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation”. The ESG 2005 do not cover the quality assurance of research and institutional governance, although they do provide for institutions to have policies and processes dedicated to these aspects.

AVEPRO, like all other evaluation Agencies operating within the EHEA, will adapt its own guidelines in the light of the ESG 2015. To have a general overview of the situation regarding adoption of the ESG, it checked the websites of approximately forty Agencies, which are mainly full members or affiliate members of ENQA. The results are available in **annex 1** to this document. This research revealed that (as of 28th July 2016) almost a third of the abovementioned Agencies had published internal documents updated in the light of the ESG 2015.

The innovations in the new ESG of greatest relevance to AVEPRO lie in part I/*Context, scope, purposes and principles*. In this context, this document examines the work of two Agencies, selected as they represent two particular institutional contexts and two different approaches to quality assurance:

- *Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance/AAQ - Switzerland*
- *Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders/NVAO – The Netherlands and Flanders*

In updating its own guidelines, AVEPRO will take into account the results of its analysis of the other Agencies’ work to date, focusing in particular on the type of approach to quality assurance used in situations characterized by multilingualistic and multicultural contexts.



## **1.1 The ESG 2015 and the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance/AAQ**

In Switzerland, since the introduction of the federal act on the funding and coordination of the Swiss University Sector/LPSU (which entered into force on 01/01/2015), institutional accreditation has formed the basis for the right to denomination: if an institution wishes to define itself as a "University", a "University of Applied Sciences" or a "University of Teacher Training", institutional accreditation is obligatory. The conditions are defined in article 30 of the LPSU. Institutional accreditation is carried out by the Agency and the decision-making body is the Swiss Accreditation Council, which awards the accredited university institutions a quality stamp.

The AAQ includes the revised ESG 2015 within a single document under the title *Institutional accreditation – documentation 01.01.2016*.

The text – available in English, Italian, French and German – is structured as follows:

- Part A: Institutional accreditation guide
- Part B: Swiss Higher Education landscape: terminology and definitions
- Part C: Accreditation Guidelines
- Part D: Explanation of quality standards
- Part E: Code of conduct

Part I of the ESG 2015 is analysed in Part D of the Swiss document, which employs almost exactly the same type of analysis as used in the preparation of the ESG. The areas of operation are organised into four macro-areas:

- AREA 1 – Quality assurance strategy
- AREA 2 – Governance
- AREA 3 – Teaching, resources and services
- AREA 4 – Resources

Within each macro area the relative guidelines (e.g. Area 1, guidelines 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) are identified and for each one the following are provided:

- Explanations - where it is specified which ESG is being referred to
- Supporting evidence (useful for self-assessment and the external assessment)



### 1.1.1 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the “Institutional accreditation – documentation 01.01.2016”

For the ESG 2015 → \* **new elements marked in bold and underlined**

For the AAQ document → **express references to ESG 2015 (present in the original text) and related concepts (subsequently identified by AVEPRO) are in bold**

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
<p>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</p> <p>Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and <b><u>forms part of their strategic management.</u></b> <b><u>Internal stakeholders</u></b> <b><u>should</u></b> develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders<sup>1</sup>.</p>	<p>► Area 1.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector <b>shall define its quality assurance strategy</b>. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.</p> <p><i>Explanations</i> → In order to guarantee the long-term quality assurance and development required by the law (Art. 27 HEdA), the HE institution defines an internal quality assurance strategy (<b>ESG 1.1</b>). This strategy defines a global vision for quality assurance at an institutional level and allows connections to be made between different processes and development objectives to be set.</p> <p>► Area 1.2 The quality assurance system <b>shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development</b>. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.</p> <p>► Area 1.3 At all levels, <b>all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and in its implementation</b>, in particular <b>students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff</b>. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.</p> <p><i>Explanations</i> → In order to ensure that the expectations of different interest groups are taken</p>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, in the document stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within an institution, including **students and staff, as well as external stakeholders, such as employers and external partners of an institution.**

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
	<p>into account, the development and implementation of the quality assurance system shall involve, among others, the students, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors of the HE institution together with its administrative and technical staff, but it may also include external partners such as supervisory authorities, alumni and representatives from the working environment, professional associations, the political sphere, civil society or any other interest group, depending on the specific characteristics and working methods of the HE institution (<b>ESG 1.1</b>).</p> <p>→ The involvement of different groups may be required, for example, at the level of strategic discussions about quality assurance, and in the development of tools for quality assurance, their monitoring and use of their results for further development.</p> <p>→ A clear and transparent assignment of quality assurance responsibilities shall ensure that all duties and tasks are known to everyone at every level of the system.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i> The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• terms and conditions for the involvement of different interest groups;</li> <li>• organisation chart.</li> </ul> <p>► Area 2.3 The quality assurance system shall <b>ensure that the representative groups</b> of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector <b>have an appropriate participatory right</b> and that <b>basic conditions are in place allowing them to independently operate</b>.</p> <p><i>Explanations</i> → Effective and appropriate governance implies the participation in decision-making processes of all representative groups of people from the institution, including the student body, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors, as well as administrative and technical staff (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 4 HEa and <b>ESG 1.1</b>).</p> <p>→ The right to participate, which relies if necessary on the cantonal legislation applicable, corresponds to the specific characteristics of the HE institution and it also encompasses the following elements: processes for the appointment of representatives, type of involvement in specific process type and at specific level, effective influence of those representatives, transparency of information, assignment of responsibilities, framework conditions and type of operation that they guarantee, and resources available.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidences useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i> The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p>

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legislation and regulations that establish participative bodies and their operating terms and conditions;</li> <li>• description of the resources placed at the disposal of participatory bodies and representatives (premises, resources, internal and external channels of communication, administrative support, discharge etc.).</li> </ul>
<p>1.2 Design and approval of programmes<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Institutions should have processes for <b><u>the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.</u></b></p>	<p>► Area 3.1 The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector <b>shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives</b>. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.</p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ Each HE institution is different and provides teaching, research and services according to its type and its specific characteristics, in various disciplines or areas of study (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. b HEdA and <b>ESG 1.2</b>).</p> <p>Teaching encompasses Bachelor and Master degree education and continuing education.</p> <p>→ The coherence and consistency of the offer in terms of teaching and its suitability to the specific characteristics of the HE institution are expressed, in particular, in terms of the design and approval of study programmes, learning objectives, level of qualifications to be achieved (alignment with the national qualification framework nqf.ch-HS), work- load and feasibility for students, scope of subject area, position in relation to the environment, internationalisation, involvement of students and other interest groups, and connection to specific characteristics of the institution (e.g. distance learning).</p> <p>→ The suitability of the research to the particular characteristics of the HE institution is expressed, in particular, through the research strategy of the institution and through the inclusion of the latter in its overall strategy, its positioning in relation to other institutions, the relationship between internal and external funding, the valuation modes, the international dimension and innovation.</p> <p>→ The services provided encompass all service-based activities provided to the community and to civil society, such as short-term continuing training, on-line courses (e.g. MOOCs)<sup>10</sup>, scientific mediation work, institutional or individual projects and assignments for public and private-sector organisations.</p> <p>→ The freedom and independence of research and teaching constitute a basic principle of HE institutions guaranteed by Swiss constitutional law (Art. 20 of the Swiss Constitution). In particular, the following elements are covered by this principle:</p>

<sup>2</sup> The term “programme” in these standards refers to higher education provision in the broadest sense, including provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transparency related to the source of funding and assignment of funds in all spheres of activity;</li> <li>• the influence of external financial partners on the contents of teaching or the purpose of research;</li> <li>• the sovereignty of the HE institution in the procedure for the selection and management of its staff at every level;</li> <li>• the potential for personnel to report threats to or infringements of the principle of academic freedom, and the risks incurred by whistleblowers.</li> </ul> <p><i>Supporting evidence</i></p> <p>The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• founding legislation of the HE institution;</li> <li>• strategic documents;</li> <li>• reports intended for those responsible (management and business reports, financial audits etc.);</li> <li>• description of mechanisms that guarantee that the activities of the HE institution comply with its mission, its specific characteristics and its strategic objectives (e.g. preparation and approval of study plans, focus of research and priorities with regard to service provision);</li> <li>• description of mechanisms that guarantee that account is taken of competitors when preparing new projects;</li> <li>• description of mechanisms that allow research to be conducted in accordance with the best international practices;</li> <li>• distribution of funds according to activities;</li> <li>• description of mechanisms that allow the freedom and independence of research to be guaranteed (e.g. regulations connected to third-party funds, to secondary services of academic staff, research contracts, sponsorship contracts, procedures and guidelines for the selection and appointment of staff, description of terms and conditions laid down for reporting abuse).</li> </ul> <p>► Area 3.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that <b>principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.</b></p> <p>→ Switzerland is participating in the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999. It is committed to the implementation of its objectives. Using their own means and according to their particular characteristics, Swiss HE institutions implement the principles and objectives that underpin the EHEA (ESG 1.2).</p> <p>→ In particular, the EHEA promotes mobility (of students, researchers, teaching staff, and administrative and technical staff), the recognition of degrees Europe-wide, the promotion of a European dimension within the</p>



AVEPRO

<p><b>Part 1 ESG 2015*</b></p>	<p><b>AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards</b></p>
	<p>development of curricula, the promotion of cooperation between institutions, and cooperation in the field of quality assurance.</p> <p>→ The degree of internationalisation of the higher education institution depends on its type, profile and strategic goals.</p> <p>→ The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), produced by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), approved in 2005 and revised in 2015 by the European Education Ministers, constitutes a European bench- mark in quality assurance. The ESG also provides a frame for the agencies' activities; the agencies must comply with the ESG in order to be recognised at the European level.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i></p> <p>The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strategy for the internationalisation of the institution</li> <li>• rules on mobility and measures to promote it (e.g. support services, funding);</li> <li>• rules on the validation of the learning outcomes and the awarding of degrees in relation to the nqf.ch;</li> <li>• examples of degrees awarded;</li> <li>• description of mechanisms that allow students to play an active part in the creation of learning processes;</li> <li>• documents showing how the ESG Part I are implemented;</li> <li>• measures and instruments for the recognition of titles and certifications.</li> </ul>
<p>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</p> <p>Institutions should ensure that <b><u>the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process</u></b>, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.</p>	<p>► Area 3.2 The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and <b>of results achieved in these areas.</b></p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities should take account of the specific characteristics of the HE institution and include internal and external assessment procedures based on quantitative and qualitative indicators. The quality assurance system is designed to ensure that the analysis of the results obtained is used to develop and improve those activities.</p> <p>→ The assessment procedures provide for the involvement of people external to the unit for assessment. These people possess the expertise and skills necessary in order to provide an external view of the quality of the activities, avoiding any conflict of interest. This external perspective is complemented by the view of groups benefiting from the services of the HE institution, which may include, for example, students for the assessment of teaching activities, assistants/PhD students for the evaluation of research activities or the beneficiaries of services.</p> <p>→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities requires the assessment of the respective supporting entities or services.</p>

<p><b>Part 1 ESG 2015*</b></p>	<p><b>AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards</b></p>
	<p>→ The assessment of teaching activities, which is distinct from the assessment of teaching staff, includes the assessment of lessons and study programmes and elements specific to the particular forms of teaching (e.g. distance learning). It reflects the active participation of students in the creation of learning processes (“student-centred learning, teaching and assessment”) (ESG 1.3).</p>
<p>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</p> <p>Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations <b>covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.</b></p>	<p>► Area 3.4 The quality assurance system shall <b>ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of the student performance and for issuing final diplomas</b> according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. <b>These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently</b></p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ Student admissions, the assessment of student performance and the awarding of their degrees are essential components of the “student life cycle”.</p> <p>→ The awarding of degrees and allocation of credits rely on the assessment of the performance levels of students, including examination and other methods of assess- ing the achievement of learning outcomes.</p> <p>→ Rigour and transparency underpin the criteria for admissions, student performance assessments throughout their studies and the awarding of degrees and certificates for all education modes (including distance learning). Admission conditions are also to comply with the requirements imposed in the HEdA (Art. 23-25, Art. 73) on admissions to universities, universities of teacher education and universities of applied sciences (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 2 and <b>ESG 1.4</b>).</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i></p> <p>The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• admissions regulations and other institutional founding documents, including their compliance with the HEdA;</li> <li>• examination regulations;</li> <li>• description of mechanisms introduced in order to provide information about admission and assessment methods;</li> <li>• regulations on the awarding of degrees;</li> <li>• description of appeal mechanisms (e.g. ombudsman).</li> </ul>
<p>1.5 Teaching staff</p> <p>Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. <b>They should apply fair and transparent</b></p>	<p>► Area 4.2 The quality assurance system <b>shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics</b> of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. <b>To this end, it shall also provide for its periodic assessment</b></p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ In order to adequately complete its mission, the institution is to ensure that all its personnel is appropriately qualified (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1 HEdA and</p>

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
<p><u>processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.</u></p>	<p><b>ESG 1.5).</b>  → In particular, the assessment of staff qualifications includes recruitment, selection and promotion processes and, for academic staff, assessment of teaching and scientific skills. <b>The assessment is to also consider the transparency of the processes.</b>  → The periodic assessment of personnel should take into account the nature of the appointment (academic or administrative) and the specific characteristics of the HE institution.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i>  The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• description of staff categories;</li> <li>• personnel statistics;</li> <li>• legislation and regulations relating to the recruitment, assessment and promotion of personnel;</li> <li>• descriptions of staff assessment processes;</li> <li>• examples of specifications.</li> </ul>
<p>1.6 Learning resources and student support</p> <p>Institutions should have appropriate <b><u>funding for learning and teaching activities</u></b> and ensure that <b><u>adequate and readily accessible</u></b> learning resources and student support are provided.</p>	<p>► Area 4.1 With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector <b>shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives.</b> The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.</p> <p><i>Explanations</i>  → In order to fulfil its mission, the institution is to have continuous sufficient resources at its disposal in terms of personnel, infrastructure and funding, which are allocated with a long-term perspective (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. c HEDa). Resources are to support teaching and learning (<b>ESG 1.6</b>).  → The resources and infrastructure are to suit the particular characteristics of the HE institution, including in terms of teaching methods (e.g. distance learning) and to meet the needs of the institution’s activities, including in terms of organisation, planning and method of allocation.  → In particular, the resources are to include staff, infrastructure, equipment, and documentary and financial resources.  → In particular, the evaluation of financial resources is to include the type and degree of engagement of the competent local authority, funding methods and external financial audits, methods for the use of external funds, methods for the approval of budgets and accounts, and financial planning.  → The evaluation of resources is also to include support measures and structures for students (services, advice etc.).  → Transparency of the provenance and allocation of funds and conditions for funding imply data publication.</p>

<p><b>Part 1 ESG 2015*</b></p>	<p><b>AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards</b></p>
	<p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i> The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documents relating to the financial commitment of the competent local authority;</li> <li>• financial audit reports;</li> <li>• rules for the preparation of budgets and the use of funds;</li> <li>• documents guaranteeing the long-term use of infrastructure;</li> <li>• statistics concerning personnel and student supervision rates;</li> <li>• examples of contracts;</li> <li>• documents relating to the acquisition and conservation of documentary resources;</li> <li>• description of mechanisms allowing the suitability of organisations and student support measures to be guaranteed.</li> </ul>
<p>1.7 Information management</p>	<p>-- no variation from ESG 2005</p>
<p>1.8 Public information</p> <p>Institutions should publish information about their <b>activities, including programmes</b>, which is <b>clear, accurate</b>, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.</p>	<p>► Area 5.2 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall <b>regularly publish objective information about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.</b></p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ In order to ensure transparency for students and other stakeholders regarding its activities, HE institutions shall regularly publish current, impartial and objective information, both qualitative and quantitative, concerning the activities, study programmes and degrees that it awards (<b>ESG 1.8</b>).</p> <p>→ Information and communication means vary according to the target group.</p> <p>→ In particular, this information is to include the issues of admission conditions, deadlines, costs, duration, assessment conditions and ECTS credits awarded. In addition, it is to include information about infrastructure, students and teaching staff, and teaching, research and service activities. Information about funding shall be published as well, including, for example, an annual report distributed both internally and externally.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i> The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• description of methods for providing information about the HE institution's activities according to the target group;</li> <li>• description of measures in place for the updating of data;</li> <li>• sample descriptions of programmes and of supporting means for the presentation of activities;</li> <li>• annual report;</li> <li>• external evaluation reports;</li> </ul>

Part 1 ESG 2015*	AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• website.</li> </ul>
<p>1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes</p> <p>Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes <b><u>to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</u></b></p>	<p>► Area 3.2 The quality assurance system shall <b>provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.</b></p> <p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ The teaching, research and service provision activities of the HE institution and the results achieved in those fields are to be assessed periodically – and therefore continuously adapted – in order to ensure the achievement of the objectives set and to allow the HE institution to measure the completion of its mission (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1HEdA and <b>ESG 1.9</b>).</p> <p>... (see ESG 1.3)</p> <p>→ The assessment of service provision ensures that the offer complies with the strategy of the HE institution and meets its mandate expectations.</p> <p>→ The services provided are assessed periodically according to terms and conditions adapted to suit their specific characteristics.</p> <p>→ The assessment relates not only to the activities carried out but also to their effects, their impact and to the results achieved in the context of those activities (e.g. the assessment of a lesson by the students, and analysis of the performance of students in that lesson, or the assessment of the resources invested in a research activity and of the performance of that research activity).</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i></p> <p>The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• descriptions of assessment processes for teaching, research and service provision;</li> <li>• examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;</li> <li>• description of framework conditions and measures adopted in order to improve the quality of teaching, research and service provision, and their effects;</li> <li>• examples of improvements made following assessments;</li> <li>• student statistics;</li> <li>• activity reports at different levels of the institution;</li> <li>• description of processes that guarantee the connection of teaching with research and with changes in society and professional fields.</li> </ul>
<p>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance. Institutions should undergo</p>	<p>► Area 1.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall <b>periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.</b></p>

<p><b>Part 1 ESG 2015*</b></p>	<p><b>AAQ Part D - Explanation of quality standards</b></p>
<p>external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.</p>	<p><i>Explanations</i></p> <p>→ A relevant quality assurance system implies that the objectives set meet the needs of the HE institution. Its periodic analysis allows the HE institution to ensure that it conducts adequate monitoring of its teaching, research and service provision, thereby applying itself to long-term quality development (Art. 27 HEdA and <b>ESG 1.10</b>).</p> <p>→ Periodic analysis of the quality assurance system implies internal and external assessment. Those assessments may take different forms and apply at different organisational levels (institution, faculty/department, unit/service, study programme, etc.).</p> <p>→ The concept of external assessment implies an external perspective of the unit concerned or a perspective external to the institution itself while ensuring that conflicts of interest are avoided.</p> <p>→ The results of assessments offer the HE institution new perspectives, particularly if external, and they allow the activities of the institution to be adapted or improved. They are taken into account in subsequent assessments in order to ensure coordinated and continuous improvement.</p> <p><i>Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment</i></p> <p>The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• descriptions of the quality assurance system's assessment processes;</li> <li>• examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;</li> <li>• examples of changes in the quality assurance system subsequent to assessments.</li> </ul>



### 1.3 The ESG 2015 and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders/NVAO

“NVAO is an international body established by treaty, which is recognised as a legal entity under Dutch public law, in accordance with the Treaty of 3 September 2003 between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium concerning the accreditation of Dutch and Flemish higher education programmes<sup>3</sup>”.

Institutional review is mandatory for statutory registered institutions but not for non-statutory registered institutions.

The ESG 2015 have been included by NVAO in two distinct documents, the *Framework For Institutional Reviews – Flanders 2015-2017* and the *Quality Code - Flanders 2015-2017* - both texts and available in Flemish and English:

- ***Framework For Institutional Reviews – Flanders 2015-2017***  
The document, which corresponds to the topics included in the *Flemish Higher Education Codex* and in the cycle of PDCA<sup>4</sup>, contains norms and indications regarding the regular evaluation of higher education institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders, based on four standards:
  - vision and policy,
  - policy implementation,
  - evaluation and monitoring
  - improvement policies.
  
- ***Quality Code - Flanders 2015-2017***  
This document, which contains guidelines on specific characteristics regarding the quality of programmes, is an integration of the *Framework for Institutional Reviews* and only applies to extensive institutional evaluation.

The evaluation system used by NVAO involves:

	(regular) institutional evaluation	EXTENSIVE institutional evaluation
	<i>Framework For Institutional Reviews</i>	<i>Framework For Institutional Reviews + Quality code</i>
➔ evaluation of educational policy, quality assurance and the culture of quality within the institution	✓	✓

<sup>3</sup> <https://nvaio.com/about-nvaio/organisation>.

<sup>4</sup> The PDCA cycle (plan/do/check/act or plan/do/check/adjust) is a continuous quality improvement model consisting out of a logical sequence of four repetitive steps for continuous improvement and learning.

	(regular) institutional evaluation  <i>Framework For Institutional Reviews</i>	EXTENSIVE institutional evaluation  <i>Framework For Institutional Reviews + Quality code</i>
PROCESS OF HORIZONTAL EVALUATION - level 1	✓	✓
PROCESS OF VERTICAL EVALUATION - level 2	✓	✓
➔ evaluation of quality assurance in programmes (through pilots)	no	✓
PROCESS OF PROGRAMME EVALUATION - level 3	no	✓

► During **regular INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**, the elements of quality assurance of the ESG will be examined in accordance with the *Framework for Institutional Reviews* regarding the quality assurance of processes and procedures. The latter text is structured as follows:

- Assessment framework,
- Assessment scale and assessment rules (Scale for assessment of the standards, Assessment rules for the final conclusion),
- Composition of the review panel,
- Assessment process (Administrative consultation, Accreditation portrait, Critical reflection, Site visit, First visit: exploration, Second visit: in-depth study, Assessment procedure within the panel, Review report)
- NVAO decision-making
- Appeals (Internal appeals, External appeals)
- Required documents (Basic data concerning the institution, Mandatory information in the critical reflection, Documents for perusal during the visits)

The review enables the institution to demonstrate the vision with which it operates, the policy it pursues, the achievements resulting from that policy, the measures for improvement it has taken, and any new policy it has developed. The review comprises all policy domains that support the quality of the education provided, i.e., including policy in the field of research as well as social and academic services provided. **The review expressly does not concern the actual quality of the research and/or the social and academic services.**

Each institution chooses a structure and quality culture that suit its vision. As a component of an organisational culture, the quality culture is focused on continuous quality improvement. It is



reflected in an institution-wide quality assurance system and thus constitutes the foundation of the quality of an institution’s educational policy as well as the actual education provided<sup>5</sup>.

► During the **EXTENSIVE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**, which constitutes an additional phase to the regular review, **only the elements of the ESG regarding the quality of programmes will be taken into consideration**, which are mentioned in the Quality Code as signs of high quality and not precise standards to be met.

The elements of the ESG regarding the quality of education provided constitute guidelines both for the institution, in its development of quality assurance, and for the evaluation teams, in the context of their work. The Quality code expressly states that these guidelines should not be used as standards by the teams evaluating programmes.

### 1.2.1 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the Framework for institutional reviews – Flanders 2015-2017

For the ESG 2015 → \* **new elements marked in bold and underlined**

For the NVAO document → **express reference to the ESG 2015 and related concepts (both identified following analysis by AVEPRO) in bold**

Part 1 ESG 2015*	Framework for institutional reviews – Flanders 2015-2017
<p>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</p> <p>Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and <b><u>forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should</u></b> develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.</p> <p>1.2 Design and approval of programmes<sup>6</sup></p> <p>Institutions should have processes for <b><u>the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting</u></b></p>	<p>Assessment framework</p> <p>► Standard 1 - Vision and Policy</p> <p>The institution’s vision of higher education and its quality, the policy it pursues with regard to education. and the policy it pursues with regard to research and social and academic services in relation to the quality of education, offer an adequate response to the social challenges.</p> <p>Criteria: The institution has a broadly supported vision of education and a corresponding policy. The policy comprises, as a minimum: policy regarding education, as well as research and social and academic services in relation to education.</p> <p>The institution <b>has a vision of higher education and the quality of its programmes in relation to the social challenges of its environment (ESG 1.2)</b>. The connections may be fleshed out at the regional, national, European or international level. <b>To realise its vision, the institution has formulated an adequate policy (ESG 1.1)</b>. One of the key focal points of this policy is providing students with the qualifications necessary to meet the challenges of civil society. <b>It is essential for all those involved to play an active role in</b></p>

<sup>5</sup> Framework For Institutional Reviews –Flanders 2015-2017, p. 5

<sup>6</sup> The term “programme” in these standards refers to higher education provision in the broadest sense, including provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.



Part 1 ESG 2015*	Framework for institutional reviews – Flanders 2015-2017
<p><u>from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.</u><sup>7</sup>.</p>	<p>the establishment of the vision and policy (ESG 1.1); this characterises a quality culture.</p> <p>► Standard 2 - Policy implementation The institution has <b>adequate policy measures, processes, procedures, practices and instruments at its disposal to realise its policy in an effective manner (ESG 1.1), and to optimise the quality of the programmes offered (ESG 1.2).</b></p> <p>Criteria: The institution pursues its education policy in an adequate manner, using policy measures, processes, procedures, practices and instruments, among other ways. <b>Adequate policy implementation presupposes concrete objectives ensuing from the vision and allocation of sufficient resources to implement the policy (ESG 1.1).</b> The institution explains what policy measures, processes, procedures, practices and instruments it uses and why it deems those most efficient and effective. <b>The quality culture in place is demonstrated by the participation, the process, the results and the manner in which the instruments are deployed (ESG 1.2).</b></p> <p>► Standard 4 - Enhancement policy The institution takes measures <b>to improve the realisation of its policy objectives (ESG 1.1).</b></p> <p>Criteria: The institution can demonstrate that it is systematically improving its education policy wherever necessary. The institution pursues <b>an active improvement policy based on the outcomes of its measuring and assessment activities (ESG 1.9).</b> Among other things, it demonstrates its ability to innovate and adapt in order to improve the education it provides. The improvement policy pursued by the institution results in a quality culture, in which all those involved contribute to innovation, and to quality improvement.</p>
<p>1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes</p> <p>Institutions should monitor and</p>	<p>► Standard 3 - Evaluation and monitoring The institution guarantees the effectiveness of its policy implementation for the benefit of the quality of education by <b>setting up feedback and monitoring systems (ESG 1.9)</b> and, in particular, internal quality monitoring systems.</p>

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise specified, in the document stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders, such as employers and external partners of an institution.

Part 1 ESG 2015*	Framework for institutional reviews – Flanders 2015-2017
<p>periodically review their programmes <b><u>to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.</u></b></p> <p>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</p> <p>Institutions should ensure that <b><u>the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process,</u></b> and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.</p>	<p>Criteria: The institution <b>gauges and evaluates the effectiveness of its policy implementation on a regular basis in order to guarantee the quality of the education it provides (ESG 1.9).</b> To this end, it has an adequate quality assurance system in place.</p> <p>In order to be able to guarantee the effectiveness of its policy, the institution must have insight into the extent to which its vision of education is realised under the policy it pursues. To this end, it has a proper evaluation and monitoring system in place. This system provides the institution with aggregated information. This information pertains to all relevant policy domains, including any procedures and instruments the institution deploys to realise its policy objectives and guarantee the quality of education.</p> <p>The system of regular internal evaluations and external assessments ties in with the management model pursued. Institution-wide uniformity in the evaluation and gauging activities is not required.</p> <p><b>An active role by students (ESG 1.3), staff, alumni, external and independent experts from the disciplines and the professional field is essential in a quality assurance system, and bolsters the further development of a quality culture.</b></p>

### 1.3.2 Comparison between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the Quality Code - Flanders 2015-2017

The Quality Code - Flanders integrates the quality characteristics using a terminology that leaves a broad margin of operation to the individual Institutions.

The transmission of quality assurance to the programmes is ensured by eight quality characteristics derived from the revised ESG and expressly identified in the text, which carries an annex indicating the sources:

- a) The programme's learning outcomes constitute a transparent and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content and orientation.
  - ESG 1.2. Design and approval of programmes
- b) The programme's curriculum ties in with the most recent developments in the discipline, takes account of the developments in the professional field, and is relevant to society.
  - ESG 1.2. Design and approval of programmes
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes



- c) The staff allocated to the programme provide the students with optimum opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes.
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - ESG 1.5. Teaching staff
- d) The programme offers the students adequate and easily accessible services, facilities and counselling.
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support
  - ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes
- e) The teaching and learning environment encourages the students to play an active role in the learning process and fosters smooth study progress.
  - ESG 1.2. Design and approval of programmes
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
- f) The assessment of students reflects the learning process and concretises the intended learning outcomes.
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes
- g) The programme provides comprehensive and readable information on all stages of study.
  - ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
  - ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
  - ESG 1.8. Public information
- h) Information regarding the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.
  - ESG 1.8. Public information
  - ESG 1.9. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

## Annex 1

Table summarising AVEPRO's analysis regarding adoption of the revised ESG, conducted through the websites of Agencies operating within EHEA – data updated as of 28<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

\* Agencies NOT members of ENQA

AGENCY		UPDATES	NOTE
<b>AUSTRIA</b>			
<b>AQA</b>	<b>Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance</b>	<b>YES</b>	The website contains the laws that regulate the accreditation of “Colleges/ Fachhochschulen” and “Private Universities/ Privatuniversitäten” of July 2015, which do not make express reference to the individual ESG in the specific texts, although there is a general reference with a link to the ESG 2015
<b>FHR*</b>	<b>Österreichische Fachhochschul-Konferenz</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>BELGIUM</b>			
<b>AEQES</b>	<b>Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>VLUHR-QAU</b>	<b>Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ found document “Educational assessment 2015-2020” making express reference to NVAO, the competent body for accreditation in Flemish Institutions
<b>BULGARIA</b>			
<b>NEAA</b>	<b>National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ found document “Criteria system for institutional accreditation of higher schools” updated to 2011
<b>CROATIA</b>			
<b>ASHE</b>	<b>Agency for Science and Higher Education</b>	<b>YES</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines for general evaluation ➔ found

AGENCY		UPDATES	NOTE
			two documents which expressly cite the ESG 2015: “ASHE Strategy 2016-20120” and “Guidelines for Development, Accreditation and Implementation of Joint Programmes in Croatia” of July 2016
<b>CZECH REPUBLIC</b>			
<b>ACCR</b>	<b>Accreditation Commission Czech Republic</b>	<b>YES</b>	found one document of February 2016 “Internal Quality Assurance of the ACCR_ which contains “Methodology of Internal Quality Assurance of the Accreditation Commission Czech Republic”
<b>DENMARK</b>			
<b>AKKR</b>	<b>Danish Accreditation Institution</b>	<b>NO</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ found document “Guide to institutional accreditation” updated to 2013 ➔ found document “SER 2016” which complies with the ESG (part 2 and part 3) but no document with specific general guidelines of the agency for evaluation
<b>FRANCE</b>			
<b>HCERES</b>	<b>Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur</b>	<b>YES</b>	Express mention of the ESG 2015 is made in the introduction to the site 2015 with a link to the French version of the text ➔ found document “SER 2016” which complies with the ESG 2015 (part 2 and part 3) but no document with specific general guidelines of the agency for evaluation
<b>CTI</b>	<b>Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur, Neuilly-sur-Seine</b>	<b>YES</b>	found the document “Colloque_Cti_ESG201508” which expressly mentions adaptation to the ESG 2015 and analyses the <i>recommandations</i> provided by the Agency
<b>GERMANY</b>			
<b>GAC</b>	<b>German Accreditation Council / Akkreditierungsrat</b>	<b>NO</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ the section “Dokumente dritten” contains a single document from 2015 regarding internal issues: all other documents

	AGENCY	UPDATES	NOTE
			predate this.
<b>ACQUIN</b>	<b>Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found a document of December 2015 “Guidelines for institutional accreditation”
<b>AHPGS</b>	<b>Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ in the download section of the website only the pre-2015 ESG are available
<b>AKAST*</b>	<b>Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung kanonischer Studiengänge in Deutschland</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>AQAS</b>	<b>Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>ASIIN</b>	<b>Accreditation Agency Specialised in Accrediting Degree Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found a document of December 2015 “Criteria for the accreditation of degree programmes – ASIIN Quality Seal”
<b>EVALAG</b>	<b>Stiftung Evaluationsagentur Baden-Wuerttemberg</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>FIBAA</b>	<b>Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ their site contains an “Assessment guide for the certification of continuing education courses” from 2014 with a link to the pre-2015 ESG
<b>ZEvA</b>	<b>Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 (found a document of 2010)
<b>IRELAND</b>			
<b>HEA*</b>	<b>Higher Education Authority</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>QQI</b>	<b>Quality and Qualifications Ireland</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ their guidelines are updated to 2013

AGENCY		UPDATES	NOTE
			“Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013”
<b>ITALY</b>			
<b>ANVUR*</b>	<b>Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ the text of the ESG 2015 is on the website
<b>CNVSU*</b>	<b>Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>LITHUANIA</b>			
<b>SKVC</b>	<b>Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines on the English version of the website
<b>MALTA</b>			
<b>APQRU*</b>	<b>Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b>			
<b>NVAO</b>	<b>Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found a document of 2015 “Quality Code - Flanders 2015-2017” which makes express reference to the ESG 2015
<b>QANU</b>	<b>Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines
<b>NORWAY</b>			
<b>NOKUT</b>	<b>Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>POLAND</b>			
<b>PKA</b>	<b>Polish Accreditation Committee</b>	<b>YES</b>	➔ The “Templates and procedures” section of the website contains the notice “Templates of self-evaluation and assessment reports for both programme and institutional assessment <i>have been amended in December 2015 and are not available in English yet</i> ”



AVEPRO

AGENCY		UPDATES	NOTE
<b>PORTUGAL</b>			
<b>A3ES</b>	<b>Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education</b>	NO – adaptation planned in 2016	➔ The “Plano de Atividades para 2016” contains a point expressly mentioning adaptation to the new criteria of the ESG 2015
<b>SERBIA</b>			
<b>CAQA</b>	<b>Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment</b>	NO – adaptation planned in 2016	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ a document on the website, “Presentation of CAQA on TREND 2016”, expressly mentions adaptation to the new criteria of the ESG 2015
<b>SPAIN</b>			
<b>AAC-DEVA</b>	<b>Agencia Andaluza del Conocimiento</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found a document “Guia para la renovación de la acreditación de los títulos universitarios de grado y máster de Andalucía” of July 2015 which makes express reference to the new ESG
<b>ACPUA*</b>	<b>Agencia de Calidad y Prospectiva Universitaria de Aragón</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>ACSUCYL</b>	<b>Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ their site contains a document, “Guidelines for conducting assessment and site visit” updated to 2013
<b>ACSUG</b>	<b>Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found the document “Guia para el diseno de los sistemas de Garantia de Calidad” of July 2015, which makes express reference to the new ESG
<b>AGAE*</b>	<b>Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Research of Andalusia</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016
<b>ANECA</b>	<b>National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain</b>	NO	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ The site includes “Guía para la redacción y evaluación de los resultados

AGENCY		UPDATES	NOTE
			del aprendizaje” of 2013, which contains none of the amendments of the ESG 2015
<b>AQU</b>	<b>Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency</b>	<b>NO</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ the site contains a document “Guia para el seguimineto de les titulaci3n oficials de grau i master” updated to November 2014 and another of May 2015, which makes reference to the old ESG
<b>SLOVAK REPUBLIC</b>			
<b>ACSR*</b>	<b>Accreditation Commission of the Slovak Republic</b>	<b>NO</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ the English version of the website does not contain documents such as guidelines or indications for procedures, while the Slovak version (automatic translation) contains references to the old ESG (pre 2013)
<b>SWITZERLAND</b>			
<b>AAQ</b>	<b>Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance</b>	<b>YES</b>	Found a document “Accreditamento Istituzionale” of 01/07/2015 updated to the ESG 2015
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>			
<b>QAA</b>	<b>Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education</b>	<b>NO</b>	no document containing evaluation guidelines updated to 2015/2016 ➔ There is a section on “The UK Quality Code for Higher Education” but analysis of the texts reveals no updates to the ESG 2015



## Annex 2

### Quality Code Flanders 2015-2017

#### **Setting of the Quality Code**

In the period from 2015 to 2017, universities and university colleges will be given the opportunity to demonstrate that they assume full responsibility for assuring and improving the quality of their programmes. In contrast to the institutional review combined with the external assessment of each of the programmes, this entails that the institutions take full charge of the conduct of quality assurance and have this conduct assessed. The Quality Code establishes the general points of departure to be met by this conduct and how the institutions will need to give account.

#### **Alignment with European reference frameworks**

This approach fits into a broader framework for quality and quality assurance in European higher education. This is why the Quality Code, firstly, ties in with the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). These may be regarded as the current European requirements regarding quality and quality assurance in higher education.

Secondly, and in keeping with the ESG, the quality of a programme cannot be assured without the active involvement of internal and external stake holders, and of independent, external peers and experts.

Thirdly, the Quality Code relates to the Flemish Qualification Structure and the European qualification frameworks. A key point for attention in this context is the conditions that apply for admission to certain professions or vocations.

Finally, and also in accordance with the ESG, this Quality Code aims to emphasise that public transparency is an essential element in an institution's conduct of quality assurance of programmes.

#### **Conduct pilots**

In the period from 2015 to 2017, the conduct of quality assurance of programmes will be developed on the basis of pilots. These conduct pilots comprise both the view on and the approach to this conduct, and its concrete application in a number of programmes. The institutions determine which programmes will be incorporated into their conduct pilot. The design of the pilots may range from small-scale (cluster of programmes, department/faculty) to institution-wide. In addition, the conduct may be differentiated, for example, by adopting different assessment cycles, by a specific focus on quality features, or by differentiation in the (extent of) involvement of stakeholders and external parties.

#### **The extensive institutional review**

This Quality Code constitutes a supplement to the Framework for Institutional Reviews – Flanders 2015-2017, and only applies to the extensive institutional review. A regular institutional review assesses the institution's educational policy, quality assurance and quality culture. Within the framework of the institutional review, a review panel will assess processes and procedures that pertain to these elements. To this end, the panel will follow a horizontal and a vertical review trail. However, the regular institutional review will be extended for institutions that choose to assume full responsibility for the quality assurance of their programmes and, in particular, develop conduct pilots. This extension will take the form of a third review trail.



### **The third review trail**

The third review trail focuses exclusively on the assurance of programme quality and, in particular, on the conduct of said quality assurance by the institution. In the third review trail, the review Panel focuses on the conduct exerted by the institution rather than assessing the actual quality of the programmes. To this end, the review panel uses the results and outcomes provided by the institution by way of substantiation. These results and outcomes may take various forms, such as, for example, internal reports, reports by stakeholders, feedback provided by peers or experts, benchmarking exercises, outcomes of surveys, etcetera. It is up to the institution to choose the form that best fits (the quality culture of) the institution.

### **Features of high-quality higher education programmes**

The ESG contains elements pertaining to both quality assurance and the quality of the education provided. The quality assurance elements are examined on the basis of the Framework for Institutional Reviews – Flanders 2015-2017. During the third review trail, therefore, the review panel only considers those elements from the ESG that relate to the quality of programmes. In the Quality Code, these elements have been articulated as the features of high-quality higher education programmes in accordance with the ESG, in other words, quality features. These quality features do not constitute standards to be met and therefore they are not assessed separately. As the elements from the ESG that pertain to the quality of the education provided, they constitute guidelines for, on the one hand, the institutions in the development of their conduct of quality assurance, and, on the other, the review panel in its assessment. When assessing that conduct, the review panel verifies how these elements have been embedded in the conduct exerted by the institution. The review panel is expressly not meant to assess the programmes itself on the basis of these features. The quality features constitute the final component of this Quality Code.

### **Involving stakeholders, peers and experts**

Involving internal and external stakeholders on the one hand, and external and independent peers (from the discipline) and experts (with, for example, educational or professional expertise) on the other, enables the institution to demonstrate the quality features of its programmes in an authoritative manner. The institution is free to determine who the relevant stakeholders, peers and experts will be.

Continuous and systematic involvement of the above groups may take various forms. Stakeholders, peers and/or experts may be involved in the substantiation of a single, some, or all of the quality features of a programme. There is no need for every group to provide a substantiation of each of the programme's quality features.

### **Conduct pilot report**

Prior to the third review trail, the institution submits a report regarding its pilot conduct of quality assurance to the review panel. This conduct pilot report may be integrated into the critical reflection ("self-evaluation report") as outlined in the Framework for Institutional Reviews – Flanders 2015-2017, or forwarded separately. In the report, the institution indicates how it has designed its conduct of quality assurance, whether the conduct is differentiated, which programmes participate in the pilot and to what extent the conduct is implemented in these programmes.

The review panel is guided by the conduct pilot report and, therefore, the conduct concept developed by the institution.

### **The assessment**



The review panel assesses the pilot on the basis of the conduct pilot report and the results and outcomes provided by the institution. The report enables the panel to focus on the conduct and assess it vis-à-vis the extent to which it has been realised. The results and outcomes involved must be provided to the panel during its site visit, rather than be forwarded beforehand.

The review panel will publish a separate report, focusing on improvement regarding its findings in the third review trail. This report will not contain a final judgement and will not be integrated into the assessment report regarding the institutional review.

The institution will be given a term of fifteen calendar days to respond to any factual inaccuracies in the report. Subsequently, NVAO will take its final decision (regarding the report and the recommendations). The institution may lodge an (internal) complaint with NVAO and an (external) appeal against any intended decision.

Following completion of all institutional reviews, NVAO will publish a general evaluation report, as well as all the underlying panel reports regarding the institutional reviews on the one hand, and the pilots on the other.

### **Quality features**

The following quality features have been derived from the ESG to underpin the conduct of quality assurance of programmes:

- a) The programme's learning outcomes constitute a transparent and programme-specific interpretation of the international requirements regarding level, content and orientation.
- b) The programme's curriculum ties in with the most recent developments in the discipline, takes account of the developments in the professional field, and is relevant to society.
- c) The staff allocated to the programme provide the students with optimum opportunities for achieving the learning outcomes.
- d) The programme offers the students adequate and easily accessible services, facilities and counselling.
- e) The teaching and learning environment encourages the students to play an active role in the learning process and fosters smooth study progress.
- f) The assessment of students reflects the learning process and concretises the intended learning outcomes.
- g) The programme provides comprehensive and readable information on all stages of study.
- h) Information regarding the quality of the programme is publicly accessible.