

External review of the agency Quality Assurance of Universities in the Netherlands (QANU)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the outcomes of an external review commissioned by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA at the request of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU). The process included QANU preparing a self evaluation report and a site visit being undertaken by an external review panel between 19 and 21 October 2010. During the site visit the panel interviewed internal and external stakeholders who provided the panel with the oral and written evidence upon which this report is based.

The primary focus of this report, presented in Part 1, is a compliance analysis of QANU against the membership criterion of ENQA. At QANU's request, the report also provides within Part 2, a critical evaluation of QANU's role in the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands.

QANU has since 2004 been a recognised independent external quality assurance agency in the Netherlands. The structure of quality assurance and accreditation of the Dutch higher education system is laid down in The Higher Education and Scientific Research Act, adopted in 1992, and has been subject to several revisions. The latest revisions will come into force from 1 January 2011. Part 1 of this report therefore provides an analysis of QANU's operations within the legislative framework at the time of the panel's site visit (October 2010). Part 2 evaluates the role of QANU from January 2011 onwards.

As a result of the analysis the panel found examples of good practice, areas of restricted practice as a result of legislative structures, it also identified a number of recommendations where QANU could strengthen its existing quality control mechanisms. A substantial amount of evidence confirmed that QANU is well respected as a high quality service provider to Dutch universities, and the panel had confidence from the evidence available that QANU would continue to hold its position in the foreseeable future.

The review panel concluded that, all in all, QANU was substantially compliant with ENQA criteria to justify a recommendation for Full ENQA membership, for a period of five years.

REPORT OF THE PANEL OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE NETHERLANDS UNIVERSITIES (QANU)

This is the report of the review of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) undertaken in October 2010 for the purpose of determining whether the agency meets the criteria for Full membership of the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA). The membership provisions are listed in **Annex C** to the report.

1 BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

ENQA's regulations require all Full member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its regulations. Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for Full membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005.

The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, external cyclical reviews for ENQA membership purposes are normally conducted on a national level and initiated by national authorities in a EHEA state, but carried out if they cannot be nationally organised. This may be the case, for instance, when no suitable or willing national body can be found to coordinate the review. In the event, ENQA plays an active role in the organisation of the review, being directly involved as coordinator, whereas in the case of national reviews, it is only kept informed of progress throughout the whole process.

The external review of QANU was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

The review panel for the external review of QANU was composed of the following members:

- Jürgen Kohler, Chair of Civil Law and Litigation, University of Greifswald, Germany - CHAIR
- Karen Jones, Review Manager, Irish Universities Quality Board, Ireland - SECRETARY
- Eric Lindesjö, Senior Adviser, Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden
- Henrik Toft Jensen, Rector, Roskilde University, Denmark
- Bartłomiej Banaszak, President, Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland

In addition to fulfilling the periodic review requirements of ENQA membership, the review of QANU had the following purpose:

- To conduct a critical evaluation of QANU's role in the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands. The outcomes of which are recorded in Part 2 of this report.

QANU produced a self-evaluation report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. The panel conducted a site-visit to validate fully the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue. Finally, the review panel produced the present final report on the basis of the self-evaluation report, site visit and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for QANU to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that it was given access to the necessary documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review, to fulfil the panel's assignments.

2 GLOSSARY

- ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register
- ESG: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
- HBO-*raad*: Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
- KNAW: Royal Academy of Sciences – Independent organisation for the institutes primarily engaged in basic and scientific research
- NWO: Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research - organisation established by the Ministry for Education with the mandate to finance, coordinate and monitor for scientific research.
- NVAO: The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. NVAO had its Full membership of ENQA reconfirmed December 2007
- QANU: Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities. ENQA Candidate member from 19 September 2010
- SEP: Standard Evaluation Protocol – Protocol for research programme assessments developed by KNAW, VSNU and NWO and implemented by QANU
- VBI: The term allocated to Quality Assurance Agencies in the Netherlands formally recognised by the NVAO. These organisations assess the degree programmes that have to be accredited by the NVAO every six years
- VSNU: Association of Universities in the Netherlands - represents the shared interests of the fourteen research universities in the Netherlands in the fields of research, education, knowledge transfer, funding, personnel policy and international affairs

3 INTRODUCTION

Reasons QANU commissioned the review

In order to meet the membership requirement of ENQA and to enable QANU to proceed towards EQAR registration, on 24 December 2009 QANU formally applied for an external review to be organised by ENQA. This approach followed a previous request from QANU to the ENQA Board to postpone QANU's review for one year to autumn 2010, to enable the

agency to take account of new quality assurance legislation and structures within the Netherlands that would come into effect from 1 January 2011. On 1 March 2010 the ENQA President advised QANU that its request to postpone its external review was considered by the ENQA Board at its meeting on 5 February 2010. The Board agreed that QANU would maintain its Full membership of ENQA until 19 September 2010. This was because ENQA regulations state that the review of all ENQA members should be completed by 19 September 2010. The Board had previously decided that any Full member agency that will not have been reviewed by this date would automatically be designated as a Candidate member.

ENQA Board accepted QANU's request to undergo an ENQA co-ordinated external review to be completed in 2011. However, the Board felt that the reason mentioned for the postponement of the review was not fully sufficient to justify an extension of Full membership status beyond the deadline set in general for all agencies to show their alignment to the current ENQA membership criteria because a certain state of transition could be considered a characteristic of the framework conditions most quality assurance agencies are confronted with. On 18 March QANU confirmed its acceptance of the Candidate member designation and welcomed the ENQA co-ordinated external review for autumn 2010.

Higher Education System in the Netherlands

The structure of higher education is enacted and laid down by *The Higher Education and Scientific Research Act* (herein referred to as 'The Act') which was adopted in 1992, and has been subject to several revisions and additions over the years, primarily as a result of the Bologna Declaration and the introduction of the accreditation system. Higher education in the Netherlands consists of two sectors: the university sector and the sector of higher professional education. Universities and institutes of higher professional education have their own focus on education, as defined in The Act: "The universities prepare students for independent scientific work in an academic or professional setting and the *hogescholen* [universities and institutions of higher professional education] prepare students to practice a profession and enable them to function self-consciously in the society at large."

There are fourteen universities in the Netherlands, including the Open University, which specializes in distance learning programmes. In addition, a number of *designated institutions* are considered part of the university sector, including a university for business administrations, four institutes for theology and a humanistic university. There are 42 government funded *hogescholen*.

Quality Assurance Structure in the Netherlands

QANU is part of a three-tier system of quality assurance and accreditation within the Netherlands. QANU occupies the middle stratum in between the universities and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), the body assigned legal power in 2002 to award accreditation to programmes in the Netherlands that fulfil the conditions laid down in The Act. QANU's operations are limited to the Netherlands, due to the specifics of legislation in the Flemish part of Belgium irrespective of the fact that the remit of NVAO also covers the Flemish part of Belgium. Accreditation is crucially important for all programmes within the Netherlands as programmes that lose their accreditation cannot claim funding from the government; lose the right to award recognised diplomas; also, students on an unaccredited programme are not eligible for study grants. The Act identifies accreditation as the "hallmark expressing that the quality of a programme is evaluated positively."

While assessments and accreditation of new programmes are primarily carried out directly by the NVAO, The Act – as in force at the time of the site visit and of submission of this report – stipulates that existing programmes require an assessment by an independent quality assurance agency not linked to an institution or their umbrella organisation, the VSNU, every six years to retain accreditation. Consequently in December 2002 the VSNU decided that its department of quality assurance would have to be transformed into an independent foundation. This led to the establishment of QANU, in February 2004, as a foundation with statutes that describe its aims, working methods, target groups and management structure. QANU's main activities were to be a continuation of the degree and research programme peer reviews previously organised by the VSNU.

The Dutch legislature operates a free market mechanism in which programmes are assessed by organisations that are independent from the higher education sector, thus quality assurance agencies, referred to as VBIs, assess degree programmes that have to be accredited. The assessment procedures are based on the NVAO Accreditation Framework which serves as the formal and material starting point for all degree programme assessments since it lays down the key substantive quality criteria to be met by programmes in order to be accredited by NVAO based on quality assessments conducted by any VBI. Managed by the quality assurance agencies, independent assessment panels judge the quality of programmes under review and produce an assessment report. For the purpose of quality improvement, panels are given an opportunity to state their judgements and give recommendations concerning the programme under review; however, there is no conditional accreditation which would allow the NVAO to make accreditation dependent on higher education institutions matching recommendations for improvement within a given period of time. This leads to a final overall assessment on the basis of which an institution – not QANU or any other VBI – can submit an application for accreditation to the NVAO. Based on the assessment report, the NVAO should be able to take an independent decision on whether a programme meets the generic quality standards. As the assessment report is of vital importance for the accreditation decision, quality assurance agencies and their assessment committees are required to meet explicit quality standards set by the NVAO.

The Act stipulates that NVAO annually compiles a list of organisations that, in NVAO's view, meet the criteria for carrying out independent programme assessments. The listed quality assurance agencies are considered to be able to implement assessment procedures that result in reports which, in turn, enable NVAO to assess whether the programme offers sufficient quality in terms of the criteria set by NVAO. This list is therefore a valuable tool used by higher education institutions within the Netherlands to select an approved quality assurance agency to work with, which is relevant as there are several agencies to choose from.

QANU has since 2004 been a recognised external quality assurance agency, a VBI. QANU and all other VBI's operate degree programme assessments against the NVAO's

accreditation framework that consists of: (i) an assessment framework; (ii) criteria for the assessment of the procedure followed; and, (iii) a description of NVAO's own decision-making procedure regarding accreditation. The NVAO accreditation framework lists six so-called themes, which programmes are evaluated against:

- Aims of the programme
- Curriculum
- Staff
- Facilities
- Internal quality assurance
- Results

Each theme is divided into two or more standards with a total of twenty one standards. For each standard one or more criteria have been formulated. This accreditation framework guides the entire QANU degree programme assessment process. The findings of an assessment committee refer to each of the six themes explicitly. A programme is considered for accreditation when the assessment committee issues a positive assessment for all themes.

Main functions of QANU and the review methods used

QANU is a quality assessment agency which primarily assesses degree and research programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands. QANU's range of services includes:

- Peer review of university education and research
- Support for submission of applications for accreditation from universities in the Netherlands and beyond
- Advice on improvement of internal quality assurance

In essence QANU employs the same processes for all of its assessments. QANU establishes a committee consisting of independent experts who are authoritative in their discipline or specialisation, which assess degree or research programmes on the basis of a self-evaluation report and information gathered in a series of interviews during a site visit. The assessment committees do not just assess the contents of education and research programmes, they also look into other relevant aspects, such as management strategy,

relevant policies and the system of internal quality assurance. QANU ensures that all committees have the necessary expertise to provide a reliable and convincing assessment of a programme. A report is produced at the end of each process and published in line with respective protocols and procedures. Committees that assess degree programmes always contain a student member and an educational expert. Each QANU assessment committee is supported by a QANU project manager.

QANU has extensive experience of conducting joint assessments of a cluster of programmes from different institutions in the same discipline or closely associated disciplines. These activities enhance the comparability of results of assessments and give individual programmes an opportunity to learn from best practice.

The main differences between the assessments of degrees and research programmes are as follows:

- Degree assessments, which concern study programmes at the bachelor and master levels, are an accreditation requirement as stated in The Act, and are formally accredited by the NVAO. New degree programme accreditation is primarily carried out by the NVAO with QANU's role therefore concentrated on the (re-)accreditation of degree programmes which have been operational for some time. On the other hand, research evaluations, which amongst other aspects include doctoral education, are the responsibility of the universities. NVAO does not consider these for accreditation.
- Degree assessment procedures and criteria for accreditation are prescribed in The Act and published in the NVAO assessment framework. Research evaluation procedures and criteria are developed and maintained by the VSNU, NWO and KNAW, without involvement of government bodies or the Minister of Education, Culture and Sciences and are published with the *Standard Evaluation Protocol* (SEP).
- QANU's degree assessments are a key element within the NVAO accreditation process and thus are linked directly to programme funding. Research evaluations have no direct link to funding on a national or local level.
- Assessment committees for degree assessments occasionally include international members, whereas research evaluations always have an international composition.

Methods employed by the ENQA review panel

QANU's *Self Evaluation Report* (SER) states it was produced as a joint effort by the director and the staff members of QANU under the final responsibility of QANU's board. Various staff members contributed to the report. The materials used as a source for the SER are cited as including policy papers, annual reports and the results of evaluations. It was reported that different versions were discussed by QANU's board and management team and in QANU's regular staff meetings before the final version was approved by the Board.

The SER was submitted to the panel via ENQA on 8 September 2010. Three telephone meetings were held between the Chair and Secretary (16 September - 5 October 2010) in advance of a panel telephone briefing session facilitated by the ENQA Secretariat on 11 October 2010. Logistical arrangements and requests for additional documentation, alongside the development of the schedule for the site visit were undertaken between the QANU contact and the panel Secretary throughout this process, with the final schedule and additional documents shared with the panel on Friday 15 October.

The site visit was conducted between Tuesday 19 and Thursday 21 October 2010, with the panel based in the QANU office in Utrecht (see meeting schedule attached at **Annex A**). Throughout the visit, the panel undertook twelve interview sessions with a wide range of stakeholders including: QANU staff, Board and assessment committee members; university staff and students; and representatives of key organisations within the Dutch quality assurance and accreditation system, namely: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Inspectorate of Education, the NVAO, the VSNU and KNAW.

Each session (apart from the meeting with students) was led by the Chair, and an electronic note was taken by the Secretary to ensure the panel's final report was evidence based. The panel also had numerous private sessions throughout the visit to consider a wide range of hard copy materials, including numerous assessment committee reports and QANU Annual Reports (**see Annex B**), and also to share views from the previous session and identify issues for exploration in the next. The panel prepared its draft findings on the evening of Wednesday 20th in advance of the Chair giving a brief

preliminary statement on the main findings to QANU staff and Board members on Thursday 21st October 2010.

The panel formulated its assessment of QANU as a requirement of ENQA membership (presented in Part 1 of this report) against the political, structural and operational arrangements in place at the time of the panel visit, i.e. mid-October 2010. However, as directed by QANU from the outset, the panel remained mindful throughout that the key legislative framework within the Netherlands, The Act, was amended in 2009/10 with the new regulations scheduled to take effect from 1 January 2011. Significant changes to the quality assurance and accreditation processes are contained within The Act, many of which will have direct consequences for QANU. Despite a copy of the amended Act not being available for consideration, the panel ensured that discussions within each interview covered the effectiveness of QANU's current structures (Part 1) alongside views on QANU's future role and standing (Part 2). Thus despite time and resource constraints, the panel provides a brief critical evaluation of QANU's role in the future of quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands from 1 January 2011 onwards as Part 2 of this report.

Finally, to confirm, this report is based on the self-evaluation report and supporting documents seen by the panel, the site visit and the panel's discussions and deliberations. The panel would like to formally thank all those that engaged with the process, particularly QANU staff, who were hospitable, accommodating and welcoming throughout, alongside the stakeholders who were generous with their time, feedback and insights.

PART 1:

4 FINDINGS

4.1 A) ENQA CRITERION 1 – ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

ENQA CRITERION 1– ACTIVITIES (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

STANDARD: *Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.*

This criterion requires QANU's assessment procedures to be undertaken regularly and take account of the Part 2 ESG requirements, which itself refer to, as its first standard, institutional engagement with Part 1 ESG. While the issue of regularity of quality assurance operations will be dealt with separately at a later stage of this report (see part 4.1 B) of this report), this report will concentrate first on QANU's activities in view of Part 2 ESG in the analyses presented hereafter.

As for judging QANU against Part 2 ESG and as indicated previously with regard to autonomy in terms of quality criteria and processes, the panel again points out and indeed stresses that the system structures operating in the Netherlands dictate that the quality assurance and accreditation measures operating nationally and institutionally are set out in The Act and are specified by the NVAO. Thus particularly for degree programme assessments, the legislation, framework and processes employed by QANU are determined by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, as are the mechanisms used for monitoring them via the NVAO, which is a Full ENQA member. QANU therefore is severely constrained in its ability to direct or influence formal policy as to material quality standards or procedures in relation to ESG Part 1 or Part 2. However, as NVAO protocols form the basis of QANU's procedures, and in 2007 the NVAO had been found to be Fully Compliant with Part 1 and Part 2 ESG, the panel felt assured that elements beyond QANU's control were in all instances fit to be in full or substantial compliance with ENQA

membership criteria. The panel's overall judgements in this criterion are presented within these constraints.

ESG 2.1 – USE OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

STANDARD: *External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines*

EVIDENCE: The panel received and considered four documents outlining the core procedures for QANU's degree programme assessments; QANU's *Protocol: Guide to external quality assessments of bachelor's and master's degree programmes in research-oriented universities*, QANU's *Guidelines for writing a self evaluation report for accreditation of a programme in scientific education*, the NVAO's *Accreditation Framework*, and NVAO's *Protocol for the assessment of degree programmes*. Each document identified that Dutch law prescribes which quality aspects must be considered during an assessment of a degree programme for the purpose of obtaining accreditation by the NVAO every six years. These legal requirements form the basis of the NVAO *Protocol for the assessment of degree programmes*, which are emulated in QANU's assessment processes.

QANU's quality assurance procedures for degree programme assessments replicate NVAO's six assessment themes, with the fifth of these being internal quality assurance. Within each assessment, each of the six themes examined is subdivided into facets assessed against published criteria. Within the internal quality assurance theme, each QANU assessment committee considers how the quality of education provided in each programme is structurally and systematically monitored and improved where necessary. Following NVAO regulations, the QANU process requires internal quality assurance procedures to be in place to monitor the degree programme, and it requires the system to operate in a cyclical manner. QANU requirements in this theme include (i) evaluation of results, (ii) measures to effect improvement, and (iii) involvement of staff, students, alumni and professionals in the field.

QANU's *Guidelines for writing a self evaluation report for accreditation of a programme in scientific education* provides detailed guidance to institutions engaging with the QANU

process that the assessment committee will need to see a range of evidence on the system of internal quality assessment employed within the programme. This entails that it has a reliable system of internal quality assurance in place that functions properly. Examples of concrete measures for improvement are sought especially where measures are focused on promoting the achievement of the aims of the programme. It is explicit in QANU's *Guidelines* that an essential element of the process is that evaluations are followed up internally, that steps are taken to address issues of improvement and that enhancing teaching quality is at the core of this process. QANU documents confirm at the end of each degree programme assessment, a report is submitted to the commissioning university who will, in turn, submit the report in its entirety as part of the NVAO reaccreditation process. The report will be published by the NVAO and QANU once accreditation is confirmed.

In relation to research evaluations, QANU's procedures are prescribed by KNAW, VSNU and the NWO in the *Standard Evaluation Protocol for Research Assessments*. Each assessment is prescribed at the level of the institute (taking account of the mission, strategy, management, funding and facilities) and the programme level (assessing and scoring their quality, productivity, relevance and viability). This process operates over a six year cycle, with a midterm review organized three years after the initial assessment. The results of research evaluations are published by QANU on its website.

ANALYSIS: In advance of and during the site visit, the panel considered the core protocols for degree and research programme assessment and had the opportunity to see hard and electronic examples of published assessment reports (although the majority of degree programme reports were published in Dutch not English). Noting that Dutch legislation sets the requirements for internal quality assurance for degree programme accreditation, and the NVAO protocols underpin QANU's activities, the panel felt there was sufficient evidence available to confirm that while the QANU assessment procedures and criteria did not refer assessment committees to examine programmes against the Part 1 ESG standards and guidelines explicitly, the processes employed by QANU did ensure that each of the seven sections of the ESG Part 1 requirements were implicitly covered. The only exception was ESG 1.7 Public Information where it was noted that in the Dutch

system there was no formal obligation on institutions to publish impartial objective quantitative and qualitative information about the programmes they offer. However, as the reports of QANU assessments of accredited programmes are always published at the end of each accreditation process, and the QANU assessments were always commissioned by universities, ultimately the panel was content that this requirement was indirectly met. The panel's findings were tested and confirmed in numerous discussions during the site visit with the representatives from QANU, NVAO, the universities, students and QANU Assessment Committee members. The panel therefore concluded that QANU was in full compliance with this standard.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG 2.2 – DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

STANDARD: *The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.*

EVIDENCE: The responsibility for developing the processes for degree programme assessment implemented by QANU's assessment committees lies with the NVAO who require QANU as a recognized external quality assurance agency in the Netherlands to adhere to the *NVAO Assessment Framework*. The aims and objectives of the degree programme quality assurance processes that QANU operates to facilitate NVAO accreditation decisions are furthermore laid out in The Act. This has undergone numerous amendments, each being subject to consultation led by those responsible for the amendments, i.e. the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

In relation to research evaluations, the protocol arrangements that QANU implements are based on the *Standard Evaluation Protocol 2009-2015 (SEP)* developed by the KNAW, VSNU and NWO. The introductory section of the SEP confirms that this is the fourth protocol for the evaluation of scientific research in the Netherlands and provides common guidelines for the evaluation and improvements of research and research policy, based on expert assessments. An evaluation of the previous SEP was undertaken in 2008, with

input from a wide range of key stakeholders including executive boards of the Dutch universities. The SEP is published widely on numerous websites including QANU's.

ANALYSIS: As QANU was not formally part of either consultation process, the panel was not provided with any evidence of the extent of the consultation process undertaken in relation to the degree or research programme assessment protocols developed and determined under the auspices of either NVAO or KNAW, VSNU and NWO in terms of setting and publishing key quality criteria and procedures. However, the panel was able to confirm that each assessment protocol is made publicly available on key stakeholder websites, including QANU's. In the evaluation of this standard, the panel remained mindful that the quality assurance and accreditation procedures in the Netherlands are regulated by law. Discussions with representatives of QANU's Board, QANU's Management Team, the NVAO, VSNU and the Ministry confirmed that QANU inputs into national policy developments informally, where appropriate, but that representatives from the university sector frequently contribute formally to national policy developments in relation to quality assurance and accreditation.

At a more micro level, however, as QANU undertakes assessments on a contractual basis, the panel considered a range of oral and written evidence that confirmed that QANU prepares a tender document in each instance which provides a detailed proposal of the scope of the assessment to be undertaken, a description of the assessment procedures to be followed and the criteria to be used, including detailed timelines and a breakdown of fully costed activities. The tender document is supplemented by an annex of *Procedures for the nomination of assessment committee members* and *guidelines for writing a self-evaluation report*. Thus in relation to the aims and objectives of the micro level assessments QANU conducts, the agency does indeed release a pre-defined standardized document for consultation with individual universities as the scope of each assessment in advance of it being undertaken, with this document being included in QANU's operations on a contractual basis in all cases in which QANU is eventually commissioned by the universities to conduct evaluations of their respective programmes. The panel therefore concluded that at a macro and micro level, QANU was, in so far as can be expected within the legislative constraints in the Netherlands, fully compliant with this standard.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG 2.3 – CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS

STANDARD: *Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.*

EVIDENCE: *QANU's Protocol: Guide to external quality assessments of bachelor's and master's degree programmes in research-oriented universities* confirms it is formulated on the basis of the NVAO protocol, which is based on explicitly published criteria that is applied consistently as a requirement of the NVAO accreditation framework. QANU's protocol includes all topics, facets and criteria from the latter and casts the NVAO criteria in a more explicit form. It outlines 'checkpoints' which should underpin all arguments and judgements made by QANU assessment committees. *QANU's Protocol* also provides explicit guidance to assessment committee members on decision-making rules for assessments. The findings of each assessment committee refer explicitly to the NVAO's six assessment themes. A programme is considered for accreditation only when an assessment committee issues a positive (satisfactory) assessment for all six themes. To assist consistency in this process, QANU provides assessment committee members with a *Checklist Template* that requires a satisfactory or unsatisfactory judgement against each of the following six themes:

- Aims of the programme
- Curriculum
- Staff
- Facilities
- Internal quality assurance
- Results

The *QANU Protocol* and *Checklist Template* also requires a judgement from each assessment committee members on the twenty-one 'facets' within the six themes which should be scored on a four-point scale, using the ratings: (1) unsatisfactory; (2) satisfactory; (3) good, and (4) excellent.

At the end of each assessment process when the draft reports are being prepared, QANU has employed a series of internal operational quality measures that include a 'double marking' system between project managers to check judgements are consistently made within individual and multi-disciplinary clusters of programmes. Two members of the QANU Board also check the draft reports for consistency before they are signed off formally by the Board. It should however be noted that while QANU assessment committee reports are designed to provide clear and explicit judgments based on published QANU/NVAO criteria, in all instances, it is the legal responsibility of the NVAO to make formal decisions on accreditation and to ensure its decisions and published criteria are applied consistently.

In relation to research evaluations, the SEP provides the published criteria on which each QANU research assessment committee bases their formal decisions. It explicitly confirms that each assessment examines against four main criteria: (i) quality; (ii) productivity; (iii) relevance; and (iv) vitality and feasibility. Each assessment of a research group or programme ends with a summary in which the four main criteria are translated into a five point scale: Excellent; Very good; Good; Satisfactory; and Unsatisfactory. An extended description of this scale is published in the SEP, alongside indicators of how to review them. The SEP also confirms that assessment committees are requested to consider the full range of the five point scale and apply the criteria according to the descriptions given. A checklist is also supplied at the rear of the SEP with instructions that it should be completed by individual assessors in advance of the committee meeting for the first time, based on the member's provisional judgements and as a starting point for discussions during the site visit.

ANALYSIS: Having considered the oral and written evidence available, including the protocols established by the NVAO and KNAW/VSNU/NWO, the panel saw firm evidence that the criteria underlying decisions made by QANU assessment committees, both for degree and research programmes, were publicly available and measures were established by QANU and the NVAO to ensure the criteria were consistently applied. Discussions with QANU assessment committee members, QANU project managers, and staff from institutions that have engaged QANU to undertake assessments in the last 3-4 years,

provided confirmation that QANU operated in accordance with published criteria. The university representatives unanimously confirmed that the reports provided by QANU were of sufficient quality to be submitted by universities for reaccreditation. With universities confident that formal accreditation decisions could be made as a result of QANU reports. As a formally recognised quality assurance agency the NVAO also operates its own annual monitoring procedures to ensure that VBIs, of which QANU is one, apply NVAO's published criteria consistently. The meeting with the NVAO representative confirmed QANU reports were consistently accepted by the NVAO for making decisions within its accreditation process.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG2.4 – PROCESS FIT FOR PURPOSE

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

EVIDENCE: The QANU SER comments that the system of quality assurance and accreditation for degree programmes with the Netherlands is frequently considered by various stakeholders to be too demanding, too time consuming and too strongly oriented towards practical and procedural matters. The administrative burdens incurred by the system are generally perceived as too high. Additional criticism is reported at the Dutch system's two layer approach, the accreditation layer (NVAO) and the quality assurance layer which produce assessment reports that form the basis of NVAO decisions. Overall the SER states "the essence of the evaluations of the system is that the system is not completely fit for the purpose it is assumes to achieve, that it is not sufficiently efficient."

The SER does however identify that an extensive range of measures to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the national system are to be enacted by further revisions to The Act which will come into force from 1 January 2011. QANU staff, Board members and key stakeholder groups (NVAO and Universities/VSNU) confirmed during the site visit that they participated formally and informally with consultation on revisions to The Act which are expected to make the system less demanding and time consuming and place

greater emphasis on the content-related rather than procedural side of degree programme assessments.

An additional weakness of the current Dutch system identified within QANU's SER and supported by the interviews with the NVAO, QANU assessment committee members and the universities themselves was that it does not have a recovery/corrective element within the accreditation process. Degree programme accreditation is either approved or removed by the NVAO. There is therefore a possibility that QANU assessment committees and the universities that engage with the process are mindful that recommendations contained within QANU reports could result in the withdrawal of programme accreditation. While this is a matter outside of the control of QANU, and indeed the remit of this review, without the possibility of a recovery period assessment reports might fail to be sufficiently critical or reluctant to indicate useful tools for quality improvement. Additionally as a result of the approval/removal of accreditation structure there is no formal follow up mechanism built into the process. The panel was advised that the revised system from 2011 onwards will explicitly remove this tension by inserting a recovery period into the accreditation process.

The SEP that underlines the research evaluation process confirms that the current iteration of the method (2009 – 2015) is the fourth protocol for evaluation, following the protocols of 1994, 1998 and 2003. Additionally, an evaluation of the SEP 2003-2009 was undertaken by VSNU, KNAW and NWO that showed positive results and users emphasized the importance of continuity in the guidelines for research assessment. The evaluation also confirmed that administrative burdens of the process should be reduced and more emphasis should be placed on societal relevance and a broader view of programme purposes outside the scope of ensuring employability, on positioning and on benchmarking. The current SEP has incorporated these elements. The panel tested the fitness for purpose of the current SEP method in discussions with QANU, KNAW, VSNU/university representatives and assessment committee members. It was generally acknowledged by all that the revised SEP method, which includes a formal follow-up process including a light touch midterm review, worked well and was considered fit for purpose.

ANALYSIS: At a macro level, the panel felt there was sufficient evidence available to confirm the current research evaluation process, designed and developed by KNAW, VSNU & NWO was fit for purpose. However, in relation to the degree programme reviews it was felt the evidence was clear that the current system was not optimally fit for purpose, although the signs were clear that the system from 2011 onwards appeared to be corrective in the required aspects. The fitness for purpose of the macro level developments was however considered to be largely outside of QANU's sphere of control or influence.

In terms of the micro level activities that are within QANU's control, the ENQA/ESG Guidelines presented for this criterion identify some widely-used elements of external review processes that help ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness. From the range of oral and written evidence available to the panel the following observations are made where the panel felt QANU's processes could be more fit for purpose, consistent and transparent:

- *The exercise of care in the selection of experts*

QANU has explicit criteria on the procedures for the nomination and selection of assessment committee members. However, the panel was not sufficiently confident that the procedures in relation to the criteria for the nomination and selection of student members were sufficiently transparent or robust since universities which are to be assessed nominate possible student members. The panel recognizes that QANU's practices mitigate possible negative effects of such nominations both in clustered and in individual programme assessments by reserving the right to reject nominated students and, above all, by making sure that students nominated do not get involved in assessments of programmes of their own university. Furthermore, while the role of the QANU Board in the approval of assessment committees was clear and transparent, discussions during the site visit identified that the assessment committee Chair also played a strong consultative role in identifying and suggesting committee members from a list provided by QANU. The panel was not fully convinced that the Chair should play a formal or informal role in the selection process and would urge QANU to reconsider this. QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process to ensure the criteria for nomination and

selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair. However, the panel was satisfied that the role of the Chair was mitigated by the fact that the QANU Board takes final responsibility in nominating the assessment team members, thus reducing the role of the Chair and ensuring independent intervention when and where deemed necessary in case a Chair may exercise his/her role inadequately.

- *The provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts*

During the site visit the panel was unable to obtain a core set of briefing/training documents provided to assessment committee members. It was noted that the training provided by QANU, via oral 'Installation Meetings' carried out under the auspices of a specific QANU employee, was tailored to each specific assessment panel and thus no core set of materials – apart from provision of core NVAO regulations – could be supplied to participants. Furthermore when the panel questioned assessment committee members, including a student member, there was uncertainty as to whether any training documents had been provided by QANU. However, most interviewees cited the installation meeting as an important and useful element of the process within which panel members were made familiar with the quality criteria to observe and the procedural elements to adhere to. While there were no complaints voiced by assessment committee members regarding a lack of training or guidance from QANU, the panel felt the need to aid transparency and consistency more systematically and recommends that QANU should provide a core 'baseline' set of briefing/training documents to supplement the information supplied at Installation Meetings.

- *The use of international experts*

The degree programme assessments are primarily undertaken in Dutch. It was therefore reported that – largely for language reasons – QANU recruits the majority of its assessors nationally or from the Flemish community of Belgium. Representatives from the Ministry, Inspectorate of Education and NVAO identified that QANU would strengthen its processes by recruiting more international assessors; in addition, impending changes in the NVAO regulations indicate that this

endeavour is to be strengthened. The panel noted an international member was always recruited for research evaluations, which are primarily undertaken in English. QANU should consider extending its criteria for the nomination and selection of degree programmed assessment committees to include an international member.

- *Participation of students*

Discussions with students identified that there were shortcomings in the degree of standardisation of nomination and selection of students that participated in assessment committees and in the groups of students selected to meet assessment teams during site visits. The panel did not see evidence that QANU had any fixed guidelines or criteria for the nomination or selection of students. There were also reports of inconsistencies in the ways institutions briefed students in advance of meeting assessment committees, in addition to inconsistencies in the topics for discussion and the size of students attending meetings. QANU is asked to provide transparent written guidance to institutions on the recruitment and selection of students that engage in all aspects of the assessment process. These should outline the aim and objectives of the assessment process, key steps and timelines involved, and a range of topics that are likely to be discussed during site visits. Similar guidance should be included in the training/briefing materials for assessment committee members. QANU should also consider whether the national union of students might be able to play a role in the student nomination, selection and training/briefing process. It might also look to consider expanding its own Board to include a student representative member.

- *Ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached*

A meeting with staff from universities that had engaged QANU to undertake degree and research programmed assessments identified a few instances where a lack of consistency in evidence collection appeared to result in inconsistencies in findings and conclusions. The panel questioned interviewees to ascertain whether the inconsistencies occurred due to a lack of consistency in training/guidance of committee members in the need to interrogate and triangulate evidence, or whether

the length of site visits (two-days) was insufficient particularly where numerous programmers were to be assessed simultaneously. While noting that inconsistencies are a risk within all peer-review systems which to eradicate fully may be impossible to accomplish, the panel felt QANU should mitigate against inconsistencies in findings and conclusions by providing explicit written guidance on the need to triangulate evidence where inconsistencies arise as part of the training/briefing documentation provided to assessment committee members and also consider extending the length of site visits for complex assessments involving multiple programmers to ensure sufficient time is provided for evidence collection.

CONCLUSION: Substantially Compliant

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

ESG2.5 – REPORTING

STANDARD: *Reports should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.*

EVIDENCE: QANU's degree programme assessments frequently result in the production by assessment committees of two reports, (i) an evaluation report per institution, and (ii) a national comparative report (please refer to ESG 2.8 for further details). QANU guarantees that each assessment committee will produce for each institution an evaluation report that meets the requirements of the NVAO as published in the NVAO Protocols. Each evaluation report consists of:

- A general section where the committee gives an account of its working methods,
- A programme specific section, in which the committee's judgement on the participating programmes in each aspect of the NVAO framework, is listed separately. The committee includes recommendations or suggestions for improvement, if any, in the report under a separate heading. QANU makes arrangements with the individual institution about the language of the report.

The panel sought views from QANU's target audience on the fitness for purpose and accessibility of QANU's degree programme reports - the NVAO and VSNU/university representatives. Comments were overwhelmingly positive in relation to the suitability and usefulness of QANU evaluation reports for the NVAO accreditation process. The only minor negative comments related to the length of QANU reports. The NVAO representative identified that QANU reports tended to be frequently longer than reports produced by other external quality assurance agencies; in part, however, this is due to the fact that a major number of QANU reports deal with clustered assessments of several programmes offered by more than one university. However, the panel was reassured that the length did not impact negatively on the quality. QANU reports were consistently identified as being of good quality as regards providing the NVAO with the information required for the accreditation process and accreditation decision. The panel also had access via the SER to feedback from QANU's internal feedback mechanisms which sought views from assessment committee members and universities, this feedback supported the panel's findings. Thus while there may be ways for QANU making the reports marginally shorter in

length, the content, style and findings contained within QANU reports were considered to be consistently fit for purpose.

The QANU report is a step within a larger accreditation process, managed by NVAO. QANU is responsible for submitting an independent peer assessment report to the relevant commissioning university at the end of the assessment progress. Based on the findings of the QANU assessment, the university will decide whether to proceed to reaccreditation. If the university chooses to proceed, it will submit the QANU report in its entirety as part of the NVAO assessment process. Once reaccreditation is granted, the complete QANU report is published on the NVAO and QANU websites.

The process for the publication of research evaluation reports is outlined in the SEP. It identifies that after a site visit, the evaluation committee will report its findings to the board of the research organisation. The board will publish the report after initial discussion with the assessed research unit and will make its position regarding the evaluation outcomes public. QANU will also publish the report on its website. Discussions with VSNU and KNAW representatives confirmed that both key stakeholders found the QANU research evaluation reports to be fit for purpose and consistently of good quality.

Finally in relation to internal quality processes, discussions with QANU project managers, freelancers, assessment committee members and Board members confirmed the detailed drafting and checking processes employed by QANU in advance of and following the factual accuracy checking process with the commissioning institution. While a fairly onerous process, the quality of the methodology is attested by the consistently positive feedback provided by stakeholder groups.

ANALYSIS: The panel considered a range of oral and written evidence from key stakeholders that constitute the target audience for QANU reports. The panel were convinced that the degree and research reports were overwhelmingly fit for purpose, useful and of value to the Dutch university sector from the feedback provided by NVAO, KNAW and VSNU representatives. There was also consistent feedback from staff within institutions and students that QANU reports were actively considered and used as a basis

for ongoing quality assurance and enhancement at a programme and institutional level within individual universities. Furthermore they were repeatedly identified as being a valuable benchmarking tool at a sector wide disciplinary level, and of interest to wider stakeholders such as potential students, the press and politicians.

While the panel were convinced that the drafting and accuracy checking processes employed by QANU internally were robust and effective, the panel did however feel that QANU should give further consideration to shortening the length of reports. The panel endorses a suggestion presented by stakeholders during the site visit, that in relation to degree programme reports, a tripartite discussion should be held annually between the NVAO/VSNU and QANU to ensure the assessment reports remain fit for purpose, particularly in terms of length and the balance between content and process.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG2.6 – FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

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.*

EVIDENCE: At a macro level, the NVAO and QANU protocols confirm that the current NVAO managed accreditation system in the Netherlands consists of threshold accreditation. This requires the NVAO to make an unconditional decision at the end of each reaccreditation process – positive or negative. Therefore the NVAO accreditation process had no formal provision for making recommendations for further improvement or action planning. However, further analysis of the protocol documents identify that when a programme is preparing to write its self evaluation report for reaccreditation it is asked to identify actions undertaken internally as a result of the last programme assessment (five to six years previously). There is therefore a formal follow up process at a programme/ institutional level built into the process but no formal follow up actions or monitoring undertaken by QANU or the NVAO.

As mentioned previously as the accreditation decision is harsh, evidence was found from meetings with university staff and assessment committee members that there may be

reluctance on behalf of assessment committees to provide non-essential criticism or recommendations in reports. However, oral evidence from staff within institutions confirmed that informal feedback was frequently provided for improvement by assessment committees within the descriptive element of reports or through a separate reporting mechanism. Consistently staff from institutions and assessment committee members reported to the panel that quality improvement feedback from the committees was invaluable and taken very seriously within institutions.

In contrast, the SEP confirms that a formal follow up process is built into the 2009-2015 research evaluation process. This consists of three elements:

- A position of the board regarding the findings and recommendations of the evaluation committee
- The publication of results, and
- A midterm review

The midterm review takes place roughly three years after an external evaluation and consequently three years before the next external evaluation. It has both a retrospective and prospective nature and is envisaged as a light procedure. The main objective is to review the follow-up of recommendations from the last external evaluation and to formulate future actions. The midterm review is an internal procedure. The board decides on the precise form of the midterm review, the documentation to be provided by the institute and the time path. Discussions with the VSNU and KNAW during the site visit suggested there might be a role for QANU if institutions/boards decided to outsource the management of midterm reviews.

ANALYSIS: Legislation within the Netherlands currently excludes any formal follow-up element to the NVAO accreditation process. If, as the panel is led to believe, this will be amended from 1 January 2011 onwards, there might be a role for QANU in this respect. It was clear to the panel therefore that in relation to both degree and research programme assessments, QANU could only become involved in follow up processes if formally commissioned to do so by a university as part of the tender specification for an assessment or as a separate piece of work. QANU has a range of project managers with the skills to assist and advise institutions in respect to quality improvement and

enhancement but could only be invited to do so on a fully costed basis. QANU is advised by the panel if it does continue to expand into this area that it continues to uphold its internal quality commitment to independence and maintaining a clear divide between staff engaging with individual institutions on an assessment or an enhancement capacity, but never both.

The panel was satisfied that despite there not being a capacity for QANU to be actively monitoring follow up activities as an explicit part of the assessment processes, there was sufficient oral evidence provided from institutions that internally quality improvement activities were undertaken regularly and at a discipline level across the Netherlands as a result of QANU reports. The panel concluded that QANU, in so far as is possible within legislative restrictions, is fully compliant with this criterion.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG2.7 – PERIODIC REVIEW

STANDARD: *External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.*

EVIDENCE: Degree programme accreditation within the Netherlands must be undertaken every six years. This is stipulated and published within The Act, it is also confirmed in numerous NVAO and QANU protocols and procedural documents. The QANU SER confirms that within this timeline, NVAO protocols confirm that institutions are expected to submit an application for the renewal of accreditation one year before the accreditation expires. This means that an institution starts preparations for the assessment of a programme approximately two years before the expiry date, and QANU can be commissioned to undertake an assessment within that timeline. The SEP confirms that the process for research evaluations includes a site visit once every six years, and an internal mid-term review in between two external reviews. Furthermore, discussions with a range of stakeholders throughout the site visit confirmed unanimously the cycle for both the degree programme accreditation and research programme evaluations was every six years.

ANALYSIS: The panel were confident from the range of oral and written evidence available, that QANU's assessments operated cyclically and were clearly defined and published in advance through the associated consultation processes neither of which are controlled by QANU.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

ESG2.8 – SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSIS

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

EVIDENCE: In addition to undertaking individual programme assessments, QANU's assessment committees frequently undertake disciplinary reviews covering numerous institutions and a national comparative report is produced as a result. An example of such is the 2009 Economics assessment of seven Dutch universities and 63 programmes. The participating institutions were invited through the contract proposal to ask the QANU Assessment Committee to describe in a detailed separate report the state-of-the-art of economics programmes in Dutch universities. The assessment committee is well placed to assess the programmes in a broader scientific and social context and also in a national and international context and to pursue possible or future developments. Where a comparative report is to be produced, such as the Economics example, QANU asks the participating institutions to include themes with supplementary information within the main assessment self evaluation report (depending on the discipline). QANU, working on a full costing model, considers the writing of the national comparative report as a separate piece of work and thus charges a cost separately. Discussions with staff within institutions including VSNU representatives confirmed the value at a discipline level, institutionally and nationally of the QANU comparative reports.

In 2009 QANU also engaged with a research project *the social quality of research mapped out: a tool (MKO)* The guide offers a simple system for involving the interaction of society in the evaluation of research. At the core of this system are data on the achievements related to the social objectives of the research. The guide links up with the SEP and the Branch Quality Assurance of the HBO-Raad (Netherlands association of universities of

applied sciences) and was drawn up on the instructions of the platform Evaluation Research in Context (ERiC). This report was shared with the panel in advance of the site visit, and QANU's valuable contribution to the project was identified by the KNAW representative during the visit.

ANALYSIS: The panel noted that despite positive feedback being received on the system-wide reports produced by QANU to date, QANU's role in systems analysis was somewhat limited. Discussions with representatives from The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, the Inspectorate of Schools and the NVAO confirmed that macro system analysis was undertaken formally by the Inspectorate and increasingly the NVAO. As QANU operates on a full costing model, the agency has currently no mechanism in place to undertake work unless it is commissioned explicitly, as was the case in the two examples cited above. Thus while the role of QANU is limited in this respect, the evidence available to the panel suggests QANU makes a useful contribution to system wide analysis to date, and may continue to have a role in this regard in the future. The panel felt, within the limitations of the system in the Netherlands, and the funding constraints that QANU operates under, QANU is fully compliant with this criterion.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

4.1 B) ENQA CRITERION 1 – ESG 3.1, 3.3 ACTIVITIES

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

EVIDENCE: QANU's SER reports the agency's main activity is the preparation and organization of assessments of degree programmes offered by universities. QANU has for many years been operating as the predominant VBI for the university sector, thus conducts a vast number of evaluations for accreditation purposes. From its establishment in 2004 until the end of 2009, QANU has assessed a total of 861 degree programmes. It tends to operate around 100-150 assessments per year. Discussions with a wide variety of key stakeholders throughout the site visit, including the VSNU and NVAO representatives confirmed that QANU maintains a near monopoly on programme assessments within the Netherlands, undertaking reportedly 90-95% of all university degree programme assessments. This position was clarified as being partly historical, as

QANU's origins lie within the VSNU, the representative body of the universities. However, senior managers from individual universities identified that most universities continued utilising QANU as the external agency for degree and research programme assessments due to the high quality of the service provided by QANU, the professionalism of its staff and good standing and experience of the assessment committee members it deploys. QANU therefore continues to be seen as the external quality assurance agency of choice for the university sector in the Netherlands.

The QANU SER identifies that until 2003 the VSNU held a monopoly on research assessments. From 2003 onwards this was no longer the case as research assessments were not obliged to be organised at a national level. Consequently, the number and size of research programme assessments varies each year, but around fifty assessments were conducted between 2004 and 2010, averaging around 6 per year, rising to 10 in 2009 and 21 in 2010. QANU has carried out research assessments of programmes conducted within a single institution, but the majority involve multiple institutions. As a consequence, the duration of a research assessment can vary from a few months to two years.

ANALYSIS: Overwhelming evidence was cited by stakeholders, particularly the VSNU representatives and staff from within institutions that QANU maintains its dominant position in the free-market system operating within the Netherlands partly as a result of its evolution from the VSNU but primarily due to the quality of the service it provides. It was considered to be especially adept at managing large and complex reviews, at degree and research programme levels, involving numerous programmes and/or institutions. As long as QANU continued to be a cost-effective high quality service provider, with access to a range of highly experienced assessors, its prominence in the market within the Netherlands was anticipated to continue. Therefore, the panel is fully satisfied to state that QANU has undertaken external quality assurance activities on a regular basis. This also applies to research assessments.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

4.2 ENQA CRITERION 2 – ESG 3.2: OFFICIAL STATUS

STANDARD: *Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.*

EVIDENCE: In advance of the site visit, the Panel received a copy of QANU's *Articles of Association* (amended 17 March 2010) which confirmed that QANU was legally established on 3 February 2004 as a foundation established in Utrecht and registered at the Chamber for the Central Netherlands under number 30193854. In the Netherlands, the legislative opted for a free market of quality assessment agencies thus the NVAO (a Full ENQA member since 2003 with membership reconfirmed in Dec 2007), was given the legal task to annually draw up a list of quality assessment agencies that were considered capable of producing assessment reports that meet NVAO requirements at the time of assessment.

To be eligible for inclusion on the list, quality assessment agencies annually submitted a programme dossier to NVAO in which they point out how they meet the requirements of the NVAO's *Protocol for Quality Assessment Agencies – the Netherlands*, in order to be inserted on the list. This includes requirements that: the quality assessment agency should be an independent organisation, its assessment panels should be of good quality and its assessment reports should enable NVAO to make independent judgements whether assessed programmes offer sufficient generic quality. QANU's SER and website alongside the NVAO website confirm that QANU has since 2004 been formally recognised as a quality assurance agency, a VBI, in Dutch a *Visiterende en Beoordelende Instantie*, by the NVAO.

ANALYSIS: Discussions conducted during the main site visit with the representatives of the NVAO, The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Inspectorate of Education, the VSNU and KNAW confirmed in all instances that QANU was officially recognised as an external quality assurance agency in compliance with national requirements within the Netherlands. The company is also recognised as a foundation in Utrecht thus has legal standing.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

4.3 ENQA CRITERION 3 – ESG 3.4: RESOURCES

STANDARD: *Agencies should have adequate and proportional 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, procedures and staff.*

EVIDENCE: QANU's SER and discussions with the Board and Management Team identified that the agency does not receive any form of structural or systematic funding from the Dutch government or other institutions or organizations. QANU's *Articles of Association* confirm that the primary financial means of the foundation consist of income from services rendered through acquiring assignments for assessments or other externally funded activities. The accuracy of this statement was confirmed by representatives from the Ministry, VSNU and NVAO in various meetings throughout the site visit.

The majority of QANU's assignments have been degree programme assessments across the Dutch university sector. The SER highlights that since 2004 QANU has organised and conducted the assessment of a total of 861 degree programmes, with approximately 47 assessments of research programmes since 2004 – many of which involving multiple institutions. In advance of the site visit, the panel examined a sample QANU contract proposal for Economics programme assessments at seven Dutch Universities in 2009. This was a fully costed tender for the assessment of 63 individual programmes (22 Bachelor's and 41 Masters programmes).

QANU's revenues vary from year to year, depending on the number of assignments it attracts. QANU has therefore adopted a reserves policy to create a financial buffer when the annual operating results are positive to enable it to continue operating in less profitable times. QANU experienced a difficult period in 2008 when the number of degree programme assessments was very limited. It lost a significant amount of staff as a result and consequently established a number of projects to decrease its financial dependence on the assessment of degree programmes. It also introduced a human resource policy that enabled its staffing compliment to be flexible in line with business needs. The SER

identifies QANU's permanent staffing compliment at the time of finalizing the SER was 13, including 9 project managers responsible for managing the QANU assessments, alongside approximately 10 freelance project managers who produce approximately 15% of QANU's reports. The panel met with the majority of permanent staff during the site visit and with representatives of freelance personnel.

A partnership approach of working with universities and the NVAO provides QANU's project managers with opportunities to continue their careers at a university or at the NVAO if desired or required. Furthermore, arrangements are in place for quality assurance staff from the universities to undertake secondments with QANU. The SER identified that the foundation has build into its business model flexibility to deal with a peak in assessment activities expected in 2011 and 2012 and a potential difficult period in 2014.

ANALYSIS: Discussions with various key stakeholders confirmed that the services provided by QANU were of a high quality and were considered cost efficient and effective. When questioned whether universities might seek to continue utilising QANU for degree programme assessments in the future given QANU operates within a free marketplace nationally, its prominent position was seen as likely to continue as the universities maintained it would continue to be largely the most cost effective method of external review for degree programme assessments at least for the foreseeable future. University representatives also commented that processes steered by QANU were not only of a high standard in terms of quality but also in view of handling matters in due process, with no complaints as regards setting and matching adequate time lines. Therefore the panel concluded that QANU has adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to organize and carry out its activities.

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

4.4 ENQA CRITERION 4 – ESG 3.5: MISSION STATEMENT

STANDARD: *Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement*

EVIDENCE: The panel considered a variety of hard and electronic documents in advance of and during the site visit. These included QANU's SER, website, *Articles of Association*,

assessment committee reports, operational guidelines for degree programme and research programme assessments and QANU's *Annual Report 2009*.

QANU's website states that:

'QANU offers universities external assessments of academic education and research programmes, and advice on ways of improving internal quality assurance. QANU's services include:

- *peer review of university education and research*
- *support for submission of applications for accreditation from universities in the Netherlands and abroad*
- *advice on improvement of internal quality assurance*

QANU's staff have years of experience in the assessment of academic degree programmes and research programmes. QANU works independently of universities, within the statutory framework set up for the assessment, accreditation and funding of university education and research in the Netherlands.

QANU is 'full member' of INQAAHE and 'candidate member' of ENQA and cooperates with several other international organizations in the field of quality assurance and accreditation. QANU is authorized as an assessment agency by the NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie = Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organization).'

The website also confirms that QANU is an *independent foundation which replaces the former Quality Assurance department of the VSNU (Association of Dutch Universities)*.

Within the SER QANU's Mission, aims and objectives are described. [For the purpose of this report, the QANU text is summarised and presented in a different format for ease of consideration.]

It states that:

- QANU is first and foremost a quality assurance agency which provides services to universities in the Netherlands.

- It organises and co-ordinates assessments of degree programmes and research programmes on the basis of formal frameworks which have been established by the relevant authorities.
- It is an independent organisation that fulfils prerequisites with respect to quality and integrity set nationally and internationally.
- It is primarily service-oriented.

The SER identifies that QANU aims to:

- Further strengthen its role in policy making processes nationally.
- Provide tailor-make support and advice to institutions within and outside the university sector, without abandoning its standards of quality.
- Provide an added value on the basis of its expertise and experience to the area of higher education quality assurance.

Furthermore, to achieve these aims, the SER concludes by identifying QANU's objectives:

- QANU aims at having close and good relations with universities and the academic community, familiar with the academic and scientific approaches in education and research.
- QANU will maintain functional relations with institutions and organisations in the Netherlands which have a formal role in the system of external quality assurance.
- QANU has the ambition to be a serious partner for policy makers and provide useful advice and recommendations on the basis of significant experience and expertise.
- QANU aims to be active at the European and international level, contributing to international developments and confirming to European and international standards

ANALYSIS: The panel found significant inconsistencies in the scope and content of publicly available statements regarding QANU's role, mission and vision. The panel felt it was unable to find a concise or explicit publicly available mission statement in any of the documentation it received. The panel questioned QANU's understanding of its own mission explicitly in three separate meetings with QANU staff and Board members during the site visit, and implicitly with meetings with various stakeholder groups. At the end of the process, the panel remained unclear and were unable to find any transparent and

consistently applied mission statement for QANU. When the panel's impression of opaqueness on this matter was made apparent to the QANU management team toward the end of the process, QANU still did not supply a definitive version. The panel recommends that, as a matter of urgency, QANU should prepare and publish a definitive mission statement which is to be published explicitly on the QANU website and replicated in core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports. Furthermore, any such mission statement should be jointly owned, and it should be based on, and translated into, a vision and a strategy to be followed.

When preparing its new definitive mission statement, the panel recommends that QANU should ensure that it addresses the ENQA criterion guidelines for ESG 3.5 which consist of: (i) the goals and objectives of the Agency's quality assurance processes; (ii) the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, (iii) the cultural and historical context of the Agency's work, (iv) that external quality assurance process is a major activity of the Agency, and (v) that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives.

Furthermore, the panel saw no evidence to confirm how QANU's mission statement was translated into a clear policy or a management plan. The panel recommends that QANU embeds its definitive mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.

To conclude, the panel found evidence of various definitions of QANU's mission, goals, objectives and activities within numerous documents, and it found a basic description of QANU's mission. However, QANU fell short of providing the panel with a consistently applied definitive mission statement, in line with ENQA criterion/ESG standards.

CONCLUSION: Partially Compliant

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- as a matter of urgency, QANU should prepare and publish a definitive mission statement which is to be published explicitly on the QANU website and replicated in core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports.

- QANU should ensure that its definitive mission statement addresses the ENQA criterion guidelines for ESG 3.5.
- QANU should embed its definitive mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.

4.5 ENQA CRITERION 5 – ESG 3.6: INDEPENDENCE

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.*

EVIDENCE & ANALYSIS:

Operational independence in official documents

EVIDENCE: As identified in ESG 3.2 – Official Status above, QANU’s *Articles of Association* confirms: “QANU is an independent organisation which meets the quality and integrity criteria set at the national and international levels for quality assurance agencies.” Its website adds that “QANU works independently of universities, within the statutory framework set up for the assessment, accreditation and funding of university education and research in the Netherlands.” QANU’s SER reiterates that QANU has no formal, financial or personal connections with any of the institutions it conducts assignments for. Discussions with numerous representatives during the site visit including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Inspectorate, the NVAO and the KNAW all confirmed that QANU was officially recognised as an independent quality assurance agency specialising in peer reviews of the university sector and that it was entirely autonomous operationally from the formal bodies (VSNU, KNAW, NWO, and NVAO) responsible for quality assurance and accreditation in the Netherlands as directed by The Act.

Furthermore, in accordance with national legislation, all external quality assurance agencies operating within the degree programme accreditation process managed by the NVAO, have to be independent and formally recognised as a VBI by the NVAO. QANU has been a VBI since 2004 and as such repeatedly fulfils NVAOs requirements for independence.

ANALYSIS: The panel felt there was compelling systematic evidence available to confirm that as an agency QANU maintains formal operational independence which is assessed and confirmed annually by the NVAO.

- Operational independence in procedures and methods

EVIDENCE: At a macro level, numerous QANU and NVAO documents referred to throughout this report reference the restriction placed on QANU and all other recognised VBIs within the Netherlands as a consequence of quality assurance and accreditation arrangements for degree programmes being defined and regulated through The Act and subsequent regulations issued by NVAO or, as far as research assessments are concerned, by VSNU, KNAW, and NWO. QANU is therefore largely, yet not by choice of its own, unable to independently define its procedures or the judgements arising from assessment processes as they are predefined by external agencies/bodies in respect of both the degree and research programme assessments. The panel therefore focused much of its attention during the site visit on the collection of evidence regarding the independence employed by QANU operationally, in relation to (i) the nomination and appointment of external experts and (ii), the determination of the outcomes of processes. The findings are presented below:

ANALYSIS:

- the nomination and appointment of external experts

The panel was not sufficiently confident that the procedures employed by QANU for the nomination of assessment committee members were sufficiently transparent or robust. While formally, it is recognized that the Board approved all appointments, the nomination process required further clarity. From the oral evidence received during the site visit, it was apparent that nominations for assessment committees for consideration by the QANU Board emanate primarily from a list of nominees from the university commissioning the assessment. It was argued by QANU that its assessments require discipline experts thus nominations are invited from institutions on a peer assessment basis. However, it was unclear what percentage of institutional nominees compared to nominees identified by QANU from within its network of experts are selected for deployment. While this might not be such an issue for assessments that are multi-institutional or multi-programme, there could be cause

for concern if this practice was utilized for single institutional or single programmed assessments.

Furthermore, it was elicited that the QANU Board selects a Chair from the list of nominees. The Chair then plays a significant role in the selection and appointment of the rest of the review team. There is nothing explicit within QANU's written procedures for degree programmed assessments to identify any role for the Chair in the selection or appointment process and this would not be a practice the panel would endorse. It should be noted that this element is explicitly confirmed within the SEP process for research assessments. Thus the panel wishes to reinforce the recommendation presented under ESG 2.4 – Fitness for Purpose that QANU should: examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair. However, the panel recognizes that the QANU Board bears the ultimate right to nominate evaluation committee members, so while there is some doubt as to the robustness of such mode of possible intervention it is appreciated that there is an arrangement in place which can counteract any overtly undue influence of the team Chair or of university proposals.

– determination of the outcomes of processes

The SER and discussions with stakeholders during the site visit identified that an essential element of the degree programme assessment process is benchmarking by assessment committees against a discipline specific domain framework. QANU's SEP confirms the agency invites the programmes to be assessed to propose a draft version of a domain- specific framework of reference for the assessment, which describes the content-related requirements for programmes in the specific subject area. The assessment committee will then use this domain-specific framework in addition to the NVAO's – basically generic – assessment framework, for its assessments. In its inaugural meeting, the assessment committee decides whether it will adopt the proposed domain-specific framework of reference or whether it wants to adapt it. According to QANU's procedures, the assessment committee establishes

the final version of the domain-specific framework that it will utilise, however in all cases, the framework itself is largely defined by the programme/discipline under review. The panel were concerned that in both scenarios, the discipline at an institutional level could be perceived as playing a key role in establishing the criteria for review and in turn, determining the outcomes. The panel felt there could be dangers for small specialist disciplines and cross sector disciplines if the framework/benchmark was set too low.

- The panel appreciated that the requirement for assessments to be made against a domain specific framework was a requirement of the national system in the Netherlands, and thus was not an issue unique to QANU or indeed a matter which could be changed by an agency. Furthermore, when the panel raised questions on the establishment of domain-specific frameworks throughout the site visit there were no concerns raised by any interviewees that the processes employed by QANU were in any way improper or set the benchmarking bar too low. However the panel remain unconvinced that this method was best practice. QANU should ensure there are sufficient measures in place internally to mitigate against concerns that threshold standards of domain-specific frameworks are being heavily influenced by the sector. It should also clarify the procedures employed in the development and monitoring of domain-specific frameworks to ensure they remain at a sufficiently high standard nationally and internationally. The involvement of international assessment committee members in QANU assessments may be a useful element of the mitigation process.

In addition, the application of any such scheme should not prevent non-compliant though prudently innovative programmes from accreditation in cases where universities can credibly argue in favour of their deviant approach to a domain-specific framework; while the panel was informed by university representatives that this opportunity is indeed open, QANU must take great pain in ensuring that its accreditation teams operate a liberal approach where adequate, noting that compliance against the NVAO framework is non-negotiable.

- Final outcomes of the process remain the responsibility of the agency

EVIDENCE: QANU's SER confirms that the leading principle of the agency is that assessment committees ultimately determine the form and content of their reports. The assessments and conclusions drawn by QANU's assessment committees are non-negotiable.

ANALYSIS: As reported under ESG 2.5, the final outcome of QANU's work within the wider NVAO accreditation process, managed by NVAO, is the assessment report. Once the report has been signed off by the QANU Board QANU submits the report to the relevant commissioning university. Based on the findings of the QANU assessment, the university will decide whether or not to proceed to accreditation. If the university chooses to proceed, it will submit the QANU report in its entirety as part of the NVAO assessment process. Once accreditation is granted, the complete QANU report is published on the NVAO and QANU websites. All oral and written evidence available to the panel confirmed that QANU retains responsibility and ownership of the evaluation report in relation to research programme assessments also.

CONCLUSION: Substantially compliant

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

4.6 ENQA CRITERION 6 – ESG 3.7: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE MEMBERS

STANDARD: *The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:*

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*
- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*
- *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.*

EVIDENCE:

Degree Programme Assessments

The processes, criteria and procedures undertaken by QANU in respect of its degree programme assessments are pre-defined and publicly available in The Act, and the NVAO and QANU's Protocols documents. The process starts with an internal assessment: programmes which will be assessed by a committee established by QANU first produce a self-evaluation report. This report constitutes the basis of the committee's assessment. QANU provides workshops or training sessions for authors of self-evaluation reports. QANU's assessment committees consist of a Chair, who is an expert in the discipline covered by the programme, one to three additional disciplinary experts, an expert representing the professional field (when necessary or appropriate), an educational expert and a student. A committee always pays a site visit to the institution which offers a programme. During the site visit, the committee interviews all relevant stakeholders: the management of the programme, students, staff members, graduates and members of relevant committees (the Programme Committee and the Board of Examiners).

The result of the assessment is an assessment report which is structured in accordance with the NVAO's assessment framework. The report contains the committee's assessment

of all six themes and 21 standards from that framework. The report does not contain a separate list of recommendations, but QANU's committees include their advice and suggestions for improvement in their assessments. QANU's assessments do not immediately lead to formal outcomes in terms of accreditation decisions. QANU sends the report to the board of the university offering the programme, which decides whether it wants to use the report to obtain (renewal of the) accreditation for the programme. The NVAO ultimately decides whether a programme's accreditation can be renewed on the basis of the report. The follow-up procedures in the current system of external quality assurance have been described above, under ESG 2.6.

Research Programme Assessments

A similar structure is adopted by QANU for the assessment of research degree programmes, however these are conducted against the *Standard Evaluation Protocol* (SEP) developed by the KNAW, VSNU and NWO. The NVAO plays no role in research programme assessments. The major steps of the process, as defined in the SEP consist of:

- arrangement for the self evaluation report and other documentation such as the outcomes of the previous midterm review and other relevant examination results
- selection and configuration of the external evaluation committee
- planning of the site visit
- publication of the evaluation results
- arrangements for the follow-up of the evaluation.

The governing boards of KNAW, NWO and the universities provide an overall schedule for evaluations. The board is responsible for the selection of the Chair and configuration of the external evaluation committee. The board will officially install the evaluation committee after which it will make a public announcement. It is not confirmed whether there will be a student member of research programme assessment committees.

The panel received a copy of the QANU *Procedures for lodging an objection to decision of QANU* in advance of the site visit. Discussions with QANU Board members confirmed the procedure had been utilised infrequently, possibly on one occasion, and in that instance, was successfully resolved. The availability of the QANU objection procedure alongside

confirmation that it was infrequently required was supported by discussions with institutional representatives.

ANALYSIS: The panel obtained a substantial amount of oral evidence across the duration of the site visit, particularly from assessment committee members and staff within institutions that engaged with QANU assessment to confirm that the processes, criteria and procedures utilized by QANU are pre-defined and publicly available. There were numerous positive comments made by stakeholders including feedback that: the QANU staff and assessment committee members were well regarded and, with some variants, consistently of high quality; QANU site visits were well managed; and crucially, QANU reports were fit for purpose as quality improvement tools internally and met the requirements of the NVAO accreditation process/and the KNAW externally.

However the panel repeatedly failed to get clarity from assessment committee members, staff in institutions or QANU as to the exact timeline for assessments, the construction of the domain specific framework or the training and support materials provided by QANU to ensure consistency in operations or judgements. Again, it should be emphasized that there were few criticisms expressed from those within the system, however there were some, though not a significant number of instances, of a lack of consistency in judgments and practices emerging from discussions.

The panel felt its concerns could be swiftly addressed by QANU making its existing informal and often ad hoc processes more transparent by documenting its procedures more comprehensively. QANU is recommended to undertake a review, via perhaps a session with a small group of key stakeholder representatives particularly staff from institutions and assessment committee members, of its existing guidelines, procedures and training materials to repackage them into a more concise set of guidance materials thus ensuring its procedures, criteria, processes and the decisions reached as a result, operate in a transparent and consistent manner

Overall, while acknowledging that the system itself placed limitations on QANU's ability to be fully compliant in relation to this criterion, it was felt there were areas for improvement that were within QANU's control.

CONCLUSION: Substantially Compliant

RECOMMENDATION:

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

4.7 ENQA CRITERION 7 – ESG 3.8: ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES

STANDARD: *Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.*

EVIDENCE: As a foundation located in Utrecht, QANU is legally required to produce an annual report in which it accounts for its activities, revenues and expenses. QANU is also obliged to obtain formal approval of its annual financial statements. During the site visit the panel had access to several annual reports and had an opportunity to read the 2009 report.

The QANU SER also confirms it has established the following procedures to assess the quality of its own processes and procedures:

- Collegial assessments and consultations
- A procedure to establish that committees have the necessary quality, expertise and experience and that they fulfil the requirements for independence
- A final approval of the assessment reports by the Board of QANU
- An evaluation of assessments by means of questionnaires for both committee members and representatives of the programmes which were assessed
- A questionnaire for the contact person of the assessed programmes to evaluate the procedure and the project
- A follow-up of the results and outcomes of these evaluations by QANU's management team and by the project manager

The SER also provided a summary of the results of recent evaluations, divided between results of evaluations among committee members and results of evaluations among representatives of degree programmes.

ANALYSIS: With respect to the detailed guidelines within the ENQA criteria, the panel's analysis is presented below:

- **A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website:** The panel did not see any evidence that QANU has developed an explicit Quality Policy. No hard or electronic copy was made available to the panel in advance of or during the site visit. There is no Quality Policy published on QANU's website. It was evident however over the course of the site visit that QANU operates a range of internal quality controls and processes. The panel recommends that QANU should repackage information on its internal quality measures and processes into a concise Quality Policy to be published on its website.

- **Documentation which demonstrates that the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance:** The panel was not provided with any documentation to confirm QANU's processes and results reflect its mission and goals. There was no evidence of any QANU strategic or operational plan or evidence of how achievement of QANU's mission and goals is monitored or assessed. QANU should link its Quality Policy to its annual reporting, strategic and operational planning processes to enhance its capacity to monitor achievement against its mission statement, goals and objectives.

- **The agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts:** The panel can confirm that QANU has a range of measures in place and documents that would confirm it operates a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism. This was reported in various site visit meetings as being a policy directed at QANU staff/project managers and QANU assessment committee members.

- **The agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties:** There was no evidence presented that QANU subcontracts its activities. It does however utilise a core of experienced freelance project managers, but these individuals are experienced within the Dutch system and familiar with the QANU/NVAO/KNAW/NWO protocols and procedures. Training and briefings are provided to all QANU project

managers alongside an extensive buddying/mentoring system for all new or inexperienced project managers.

- **The agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement:** The panel was impressed by the range of internal feedback loops and support mechanisms that QANU operates. A detailed account was provided during the site visit of the support, guidance and mentoring provided to new staff by existing staff and the QANU Director. Some of these devices are indeed highly commendable, such as the practice to ensure that reports drafted by a staff member are counter-checked by another staff member for factors like structure, logic, comprehensiveness, and consistency, with feedback to the author to contribute to staff development. The agency also confirmed the staff meet regularly to share and discuss a range of pertinent operational and policy issues. Staff interviewed by the panel were impressive, engaging and enthusiastic. They demonstrated a passion for their work and a range of skills and experiences.

A substantial amount of evidence was presented by the assessment committee members and staff within universities that QANU's approach and its staff were extremely responsive to any concerns or complaints raised within an assessment. An example was cited where a particular complex review was being conducted in English and thus QANU responded to this issue by not only providing an English language skills course to the project managers involved in that particular assessment, but the training session was available to the whole QANU team. There were numerous examples presented where QANU was responsive and flexible particularly in relation to emerging issues or problems.

The panel was however uncertain whether QANU was equally responsive in relation to macro or system level issues. Within section ESG 2.5, it was noted that while fit for purpose, QANU reports tended to be overlong. Numerous stakeholders have voiced similar comments before, yet it is unclear how QANU responded to this issue or other substantive issues.

- **A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency’s activities at least once every five years:** To maintain its status as a VBI within the Dutch system, QANU has undergone NVAO assessments and monitoring annually. Additionally, in accordance with the system implemented by NVAO, quality assessment agencies should undergo an audit every two years. The audits select and examine applications on a random basis and they examine the organisational aspects of the quality assessment agencies. The NVAO representative reiterated that QANU has been successful in maintaining its position as a VBI since 2004 and continues to be well regarded within the Netherlands. Furthermore, the representative from the Inspectorate of Education confirmed that the inspectorate conducted a system wide evaluation of all external quality assurance agencies in 2007 and QANU’s good standing was confirmed through this process.

CONCLUSION: Substantially compliant

RECOMMENDATION:

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

4.8 ENQA CRITERION 8 – MISCELLANEOUS

i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups. ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal

consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency. iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Evidence collected and analysis in relation to bullets (i) and (ii) are contained within various sections of this report. The panel therefore focused its attention under this item in relation to bullet (iii).

EVIDENCE: The SER reports that QANU maintains contacts with other quality assurance agencies in Europe and beyond, in particular it works closely with ENQA full (NVAO) and candidate member agencies (NQA) within the Netherlands. It also works closely with the quality assurance unit of the VLIR (the Flemish Interuniversity council). QANU is a member of INQAAHE (the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). Its staff members participate in conferences and workshops organised by ENQA, INQAAHE and other relevant organisations. As identified previously, QANU intends to maintain and further develop functional relations with institutions and organisations in the Netherlands which have a more formal role in the system of external quality assurance. It also has the ambition to be active at the European and international level, contributing to international developments and conforming to European and international standards

ANALYSIS: The oral evidence submitted by stakeholders throughout the site visit, and meetings of QANU staff and Board members give the panel great confidence that QANU's staff could make a positive contribution to ENQA and the wider international community of quality assurance in higher education. The system QANU operates is undoubtedly constrained by numerous legislative requirements; however, QANU undertakes a significant amount of programme assessments each year, many of which are extremely large and complex. Such experiences would be of interest to other ENQA member agencies. Additionally, as The Act within the Netherlands is to be amended with effect from 1 January 2011, there would be valuable lessons and issues arising from the changes in the Dutch system that would again be of interest to ENQA members and indeed ENQA itself in relation to the official status of national agencies. (Further information is provided in Part 2 of this report).

CONCLUSION: Fully Compliant

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Panel would like to recommend to the ENQA Board that QANU is found to substantially comply with ENQA Membership criteria. This overall comment is based on the positive conclusions (“fully compliant”) arrived at on most counts which constitute requirements for ENQA membership and are standards under the ESG, as pointed out in detail above, and it is based on the observation that in those cases where the panel passes a judgement of “sufficient compliance” responsibility can only in part be attributed to QANU since QANU is subjected to a number of limiting factors inherent to the Dutch system of task sharing in matters of external quality assurance. The Part 2 section of the report offers ways for the agency to continue to strengthen its operation and in doing so its ability to contribute more assuredly to national and international debates in the fields of QA and accreditation.

Overall Findings

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Review Panel is of the opinion that, in the performance of its functions, QANU is not fully compliant with the *ENQA Membership Provisions*. The agency is, nonetheless, in the opinion of the Review Panel, **sufficiently compliant** to justify full membership of ENQA.

The Criteria where full compliance has not been achieved are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| - C1a 2.1 & 2.4 Fit for Purpose | Substantially compliant |
| - C1b Activities | Substantially compliant |
| - C4 Mission statement | Partially compliant |
| - C5 Independence | Substantially compliant |
| - C6 External QA | Substantially compliant |
| - C7 Accountability | Substantially compliant |

and the agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these criteria at the earliest opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- QANU should examine the fitness for purpose of its nomination and selection process of Committee Members to ensure the criteria for nomination and selection are

independent, transparent and consistently applied, particularly in relation to the role of the Chair.

- QANU should provide a core 'baseline' set of briefing/training documents to supplement the information supplied at Installation Meetings.
- QANU should extend its criteria for the nomination and selection of degree programmed assessment committees to include an international member.
- QANU is asked to provide transparent written guidance to institutions on the recruitment and selection of students that engage in all aspects of the assessment process. It might also look to consider expanding its own Board to include a student representative member.
- QANU should provide explicit written guidance on the need to triangulate evidence where inconsistencies arise as part of the training/briefing documentation provided to assessment committee members
- QANU should consider extending the length of site visits for complex assessments involving multiple programmers to ensure sufficient time is provided for evidence collection.
- As a matter of urgency, QANU should prepare and publish a definitive mission statement which is published explicitly on the QANU website and replicated in core QANU documents, including annual reports, tender specifications and assessment reports.
- QANU should embed its definitive mission statement explicitly into its operational and strategic planning processes to ensure its mission, goals and objectives are achieved.
- QANU should ensure there are sufficient measures in place internally to mitigate against concerns that threshold standards of domain-specific frameworks are being heavily influenced by the sector.
- QANU should clarify the procedures employed in the development and monitoring of domain-specific frameworks to ensure they remain at a sufficiently high standard nationally and internationally. QANU should also ensure that evaluation committees can adequately handle cases of justifiable, valid deviation from domain-specific standards to safeguard innovation and profiling of programmes.
- QANU should review its existing guidelines, procedures and training materials to repackage them into a more concise set of guidance materials thus ensuring its

procedures, criteria, processes and the decisions reached as a result operate in a consistent manner.

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

6 ANNEXES

Annex A: Meeting Schedule for ENQA panel site visit to QANU

Annex B: Documents considered by ENQA panel during the review

Annex C: ENQA Criterion

PART 2:

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF QANU'S ROLE IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION SYSTEM IN THE NETHERLANDS

INTRODUCTION:

In addition to fulfilling the periodic review requirements of ENQA membership, as outlined in Part 1 of this report, the ENQA panel were asked by QANU: "To conduct a critical evaluation of QANU's role in the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands."

There were major time restrictions imposed on the panel during the site visit to QANU in October 2010, however, as directed by QANU from the outset, the panel remained mindful throughout that the key legislative framework within the Netherlands – The Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research, hereafter referred to as The Act, was amended in 2009/10 with its provisions to take effect from 1 January 2011.

The panel is led to believe from the QANU Self Evaluation Report (SER) that significant changes to the quality assurance and accreditation processes were contained within The Act, many of which will have direct consequences for QANU. Despite a copy of the amended Act not being available for the panel, it ensured that discussions within each interview covered the effectiveness of QANU's current structures (Part 1) alongside views on QANU's future role and standing (Part 2). Thus despite time and resource constraints, the panel felt able to provide a brief critical evaluation of QANU's role in the future of quality assurance and accreditation system in the Netherlands from 1 January 2011 onwards within this section of the report.

SUMMARY OF THE KEY REVISIONS TO THE ACT

The SER identified amendments to The Act were in part a response to sector wide concerns that the national system for quality assurance and accreditation was not fully fit for purpose. The lack of a follow up process to accreditation decision for example made the system too harsh and failed to support a structure of quality improvement. The

amendments were also responding to sector wide concerns that the accreditation process itself was too onerous, overly bureaucratic and procedural.

In essence the SER identifies the following key features of the revised Act:

- Institutes of higher education have the opportunity to apply for an institutional audit [conducted by the NVAO] in which various overarching aspects of internal quality assurance are to be assessed at an institutional level.
- If an institutional audit leads to a positive assessment, the degree programmes offered by that institution can be assessed on the basis of a restricted NVAO assessment framework which contains 3 rather than 16 standards and allows both degree programmes and assessment committees to focus on the content of the programmes [it is assumed by the panel the reaccreditation of programmes will still be required every six years].
- If an institution does not apply for an institutional audit, or if the institutional audit leads to a negative assessment, the degree programmes offered by the institution have to be assessed on the basis of an extended assessment framework, which is largely similar to the current framework for existing degree programmes.
- Additionally, in all cases mentioned above, institutions of higher education will no longer be obliged to use the services of an external quality assurance agency for the assessment of their degree programmes. Instead, contrary to current regulations, they may organise the assessments themselves. This change in formal procedures presents a potential risk for QANU's future, since it may lead to a significant decrease in the number of assessments QANU will be asked to conduct.
- As a result of amendments to the Act, the NVAO will be no longer operating its protocol for quality assurance agencies, and no longer publishing a list of recognised quality assurance agencies, VBIs, which QANU has been formally listed since 2004.

PANEL OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Throughout the course of the site visit, while not underestimating the seriousness of the challenge ahead as a result of The Act revisions, the panel nevertheless saw a wealth of evidence to confirm that what could at initially seen as a devastating legislative position in

terms of QANUs financial and operational viability, may in actual fact turn out to be more of an opportunity than a threat.

The panel's findings are divided into two sections (A) Quality Assurance and Improvement Opportunities and Challenges, and (B) Governance and Operational Opportunities and Challenges.

A) Quality Assurance and Improvement Opportunities and Challenges

- Future role for QANU in degree programme assessments

The panel undertook discussions with a range of key representatives from the university sector, to ascertain whether there was still a credible willingness to continue utilising QANU for degree programme assessments. Overwhelmingly it was reported that the 'mood music' across the sector was that despite a belief that most institutions within the Netherlands would use the opportunity of the amended Act to proceed to undertake Institutional Audit, there was a clear indication, that at least for the foreseeable future, the quality of service provided by QANU, the experience of its staff and the assessment committee members it deploys, would result in a large proportion of the sector continuing to outsource degree programme assessments despite the legal obligation being removed. It was anticipated over time, as the universities themselves allocate more resources to this area internally, there would be less of a need to outsource, but from present experiences, particularly from universities that engaged with pilot NVAO Institutional Audits recently, there was an appreciation of the resource benefits of continuing to outsource programme assessments. Furthermore QANU's network of experts was identified as being a very valuable resource.

- Multi-programme assessments and sector wide analysis

It was acknowledged that one of the most valuable aspects of QANU's skills, experiences and resources was its ability to organise multi-programme or multi-institutional assessments. The enormity of these undertakings was not missed by the sector representatives the panel met, and thus it appeared that outsourcing large and complex assessments would still be an area where QANU could provide a cost

effective and efficient service to the university sector as a whole when seen either as an operation for defining national benchmarks or for helping the Dutch system in identifying strengths and weaknesses in order to operate informed change processes. It was in line with this conviction that discussions with a range of representatives confirmed QANU's expertise in relation to system-wide analysis particularly at a discipline level, and since that was seen to be of national importance, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences may be persuaded that QANU would be best placed to be commissioned to undertake such work in the future.

– **Consultancy role for QANU – change management**

Numerous discussions with stakeholders confirmed the standing of the QANU staff and their expertise in relation to quality assurance within the university sector. Universities in the Netherlands are likely to seek consultancy advice and support in reinforcing internal quality structures within institutions in the near future. QANU should consider what services and skills it might be able to provide to institutions in relation to: (i) advice on effectively managing review processes, (ii) embedding a culture of quality, (iii) engaging with national and international quality assurance requirements, and (iv) the recruitment and training of assessment teams. While the subject discipline skill base amongst its project managers in particular will be valuable, QANU is advised to strengthen its staffing expertise in relation to quality assurance techniques. Care should be taken however that such enhancement oriented activities do not impact negatively on QANU's core functions and that staff associated with enhancement work in institutions continue to be omitted from engaging with assessment activities in the same institution.

– ***Expansion in Evaluations of Research Programmes***

While noting that the changes to the Act only apply in relation to degree programme assessments, discussions with assessment committee members, staff from institutions and the representative from the KNAW identified there could be an increased role for QANU in undertaking midcycle evaluations for research programmes. Furthermore, as with the degree programme assessments, there might

be a role for QANU in sector-wide assessments of research programmes, building on QANUs existing strengths and expertise.

– ***Strengthen not dilute QANU's core business and brand***

The panel noted that QANU suggested a diversification of assessment operations to areas outside of higher education as an income generation tool. While there are obvious advantages to such diversification, QANU is advised to explore the range of income generating opportunities available to it within the higher education sector that remain untapped. This could include the development of a small team within QANU that focuses on research and development. There are numerous interesting national and international projects that QANU could engage with through its existing networks and connections. An expansion in this area would continue to strengthen QANU's standing and brand and would in turn strengthen its position in the market place nationally and indeed internationally, if it chose to pursue EQAR listing in the future. A dilution in QANUs specialism as the agency of choice for the higher education sector in the Netherlands could be counterproductive in the long term if not carefully managed.

(B) Governance and Operational Opportunities and Challenges

– ***QANU's role nationally***

QANU's role to date has largely focused upon facilitating and operating processes and procedures ultimately designed and developed by others (be it the NVAO in degree programme assessment and the KNAW/VSNU/NWO in research programme assessments). The Board and Management Team in QANU confirmed the agency has to date abstained from playing a role in national policy development, be it since QANU felt it was not in a position to do so or for reasons of institutional policy. The panel felt that this would not be a recommendable position to take in the future. QANU had a wealth of experience and expertise in the agency and it should use its expertise to inform national developments. In doing so, QANU is likely to strengthen not weaken its market share within the Netherlands. As mentioned above, QANU might be wise to identify and establish a small but knowledgeable and ambitious team of staff within the agency ("strategic think tank") with the vision and drive to

assist QANU develop a role for the agency in future national policy with regard to both setting qualitative standards and their procedural implementation and assessment.

– ***Reinforce its services and relationships with key stakeholders***

The panel held a dynamic and interesting exchange with QANU's various stakeholders throughout the review process, both in programme development and in research policy. Numerous sessions identified the benefits of a more regular tripartite exchange occurring between a small selection of representatives from QANU and the relevant different sectors in higher education and research, be it higher education institutions or research organisations, be it organisations such as the NVAO, VSNU, KNAW, NWO, or the ministry and inspectorate, as adequate and where competent contributors may be identified. This exchange should not be at the level of senior management but rather at an operational level, thus rendering concrete answers to matters such as identifying burning issues and modes to address them successfully. The focus would be on eliciting feedback on operational matters in addition to discussing more progressive quality assurance and enhancement opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The panel felt the time was now right for QANU to move from a facilitation role into a more directional position nationally and internationally. It has amassed a wealth of skills and experiences within its staff, which are committed, enthusiastic and able. QANU is encouraged to consider re-profiling its structures internally to ensure the core assessment work continues to strive and prosper, but also establish a more dynamic progressive team within the staff that can help build QANU's market position in the future. Funding to do so is a serious issue, which the panel recognizes, but the panel also believes that some additional sum could and should be included in calculating the price for current assessments, as is the case in all full-costing models which need to take development overheads into account.

Unless QANU actively engages in national and international policy and procedural developments there is a possibility its value will dissipate over time, and there is a risk

that qualified staff which QANU can be proud to avail itself of at present will seek opportunities elsewhere. QANU is therefore urged to see the imminent changes as an opportunity rather than a threat and embrace the challenges and new directions that it may bring, both nationally and internationally, whilst still being in a position to raise a steady income from degree programme assessments or being able to receive support through national or international (EU), public or private grants designated to serve the enhancement of higher education and research performance.

ANNEX A: ENQA CO-ORDINATED REVIEW OF QANU SCHEDULE

Tuesday 19th October 2010

Time	SESSI ON	ATTENDEES
08:30 – 11:00		<i>Review Panel</i>
11:00 – 12:30	S1	QANU Management Team Director: mr. C.Peels Deputy Director/ coordinator degree programme assessments: mr. S.Looijenga, Coordinator research assessments: mrs dr. M.van Bogaert, Operational Manager: mrs S. de Vries
12:30 – 13:30		<i>Review Panel (PRIVATE LUNCH)</i>
13:30 – 14:30	S2	Representatives University Boards (also representing the VSNU) Mrs Prof.dr. M.C.E.van Dam-Mieras, vice rector University Leiden Mrs. Prof.dr. D.van den Boom, rector University of Amsterdam
14.30-15.30	S3	QANU Board Chair: Mr J.F.G. Veldhuis Vice-chair: Mr. prof.ir. K.Wakker Mrs.M.F.van den Bergh Mr. P.W.de Kam Mr.prof.dr. D.M.S.Van Damme (<i>via a brief telephone conference callat the end of the session</i>)
15:30 – 16:30	S4	QANU Project Leaders, Freelance Project Managers & QANU Secretariat Mrs. N. Pasveer, secretary Mrs. dr. B.M.van Balen project manager Mr. R. Bennink project manager Mr. R.Duzijn, free lance project manager Mrs. dr.N.Stevens project manager Mrs. M.Truijens project manager Mrs. N.Verseput project manager
16:30 – 16:45		<i>RP Private Meeting</i>
16:45 – 18.30	S5	Assessment Committee Members that have undertaken Degree Programme Assessments & Research Programme Assessments Mr. prof.dr. A. de Bruin Mr. prof.dr. J.E.J.M.van Himbergen Mr. prof.dr.A. van Kammen Mr. prof.dr. J.F.G.Vliegenthart Mr. prof.dr. A. van Witteloostuijn Mr. prof.dr. J.Lowijck Mr. prof.dr. J.Billiet
20:00 – 22:00		<i>DINNER</i>

Wednesday 20th October 2010

TIME	SESSION	ATTENDEES
08:30 – 09:15	S6	Ministry of Education, Culture, & Science and the Inspectorate of Education Mr. F. de Zwaan, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science Mr. O. de Vries, Inspectorate of Education Mrs. M.Laman, Inspectorate of Education
09:15 – 09:30		<i>RP Private Meeting</i>
09:30 – 10:30	S7	NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) Mr.prof.dr.ir.R. Derdelinckx, director NVAO
10:30 – 10:45		<i>RP Private Meeting</i>
10:45 – 11:30	S8	Representatives University Boards (also representing the VSNU) Mr. prof.dr. H.Stoof, rector University Utrecht
11:30 – 11:45		<i>RP Private Meeting</i>
11:45 – 13:00	S9	Staff from universities that have been undertaken recent QANU Degree Programme assessments Mrs.dr. V.M.C. de Vries, University of Tilburg, staff University Board Mrs.dr.J.A. le Loux-Schuringa, Univeristy of Amsterdam, staff University Board Mrs S.Gordijn, staff Faculty of Social Sciences University of Amsterdam Mrs M.J.C.Fennema University Utrecht, staff University Board Mrs M van Liefeland –Hienkens, staff Faculty of Law, Economy, Administration and Organisation Sciences University Utrecht Mrs.dr. E.M.Halsema, staff Department of Industrial Engineering & Innovation Sciences Mr.dr. Th. De Bruijn, University Leiden staff University Board
13:00 – 14:00		<i>RP Lunch</i>
14:00 – 15:15	S10	Students that have engaged with QANU as Assessment Committee members & that have been in Universities that have been assessed Roel van Veen, interviewed student Eric Dekker, interviewed student Masis Hakhverdian, interviewed student Frank Pijnenborg, student committee member
15:15 – 15.30		<i>RP private meeting</i>
15:30 – 16:00	S11	KNAW Mr J.Spaapen, coordinator quality assurance and research assessment KNAW
16:00 – 16:30		<i>RP Private Meeting</i>
16:30 – 17:15	S12	QANU Chair, Vice chair & Management Team J.Veldhuis, K.Wakker C.Peels, S.Looijenga, S.de Vries
17:15 – 18:00		<i>RP Private Meeting – including time to check documentary</i>

		<i>evidence</i>
20:00 – 22:00		<i>Review Panel - Private Working Dinner – to enable the team to prepare for the Exit Presentation</i>

Thursday 21 October 2010

TIME	SESSION	ATTENDEES
09:00- 10:00	S13	Exit Presentation to QANU Board & Management Team & staff QANU

Annex B: Documents considered during the review

Documents on the Dutch assurance and accreditation system:

- NVAO *Accreditation Framework for Existing Degree Programmes*, February 2003
- NVAO *Protocol for the Assessment of Degree Programmes*
- NVAO *Protocol for Quality Assessment Agencies*, August 2005
- NVAO: *Report of the Committee for the Review of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)*, September 2007
- KNAW, VSNU, NWO *Standard Evaluation Protocol 2009-2015: Protocol for Research Assessment in the Netherlands*
- *The Science System in the Netherlands – an organisational overview* – Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, August 2008

QANU Documents:

- *Annual Report, 2009*
- *Articles of Association*, dated 17 March 2010
- *Degree Programme Assessment Checklist Template*
- Degree Programme Assessment Report – *Master Degree Course in Applied Ethics*, Utrecht University, May 2007
- Degree Programme Assessment Report – *Information Science*, University of Tilburg, 2010
- *Evaluation of a Thesis Checklist Template*
- *Guide for establishing and implementing an evaluation of the social impact of research*, Developed by Technopolis and QANU on behalf of ERiC
- *Guidelines for Writing a Self Evaluation Report for Accreditation of a Programme in Scientific Education*
- List of assessment of degree programmes since 2004
- List of assessments of research programmes since 2004
- List of Board Members and Staff Members
- List of planned projects, 2010
- List of prospective projects and clustered projects
- *Procedures for lodging an objection to decisions of QANU*

- *Procedures for the nomination of committee members*
- *Protocol – Guide to external quality assessment of bachelor's and master's degree programmes in research-oriented universities, February 2004*
- *Proposal for Economics programme assessments at seven Dutch universities*
- *Requirements with respect to independence*
- *Research Assessment Report – Innovation & Entrepreneurship IGS-UT, May 2010*
- Self Evaluation Report
- Summary of results of recent evaluations carried out by means of the NETQ-questionnaires
- Standard programme for site visits (bachelor's and master's programmes)
- The panel also had access to over 200 reports produced via QANU assessment processes within the base room from which the panel operated throughout the site visit

ANNEX C – ENQA MEMBERSHIP PROVISIONS

CHAPTER I. CRITERIA FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Full Membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education from EHEA member states that have been operating and conducting actual evaluation activities for at least two years.

Before being accepted as a Full Member, an applicant agency must satisfy the Board that it meets the seven criteria, listed below. The applicant agency will thereby also meet the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as adopted by the European Ministers in charge of higher education in Bergen in 2005. The Board may modify the details of the procedures at its discretion.

Each criterion is followed by guidelines (in *italics*) which provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the criteria. Although the guidelines are not part of the criteria themselves, the criteria should be considered in conjunction with them.

Criterion 1 – Activities

A Full Member will undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. In undertaking its activities, the member should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in the *European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area*¹.

The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.

Criterion 2 – Official status

A Full Member should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as an agency with responsibility for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. It should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdiction(s) within which it operates.

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ISBN 952-5539-04-0, Helsinki: ENQA, 2005.

Criterion 3 – Resources

A Full Member should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable it to organise and run its external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of its processes, procedures and staff.

Criterion 4 – Mission statement

A Full Member should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, contained in a publicly available statement.

This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Criterion 5 – Independence

- i. A Full Member should be independent to the extent both that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

The member will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- *its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the member.*

Criterion 6 – External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members

- i. The processes, criteria and procedures used by the member should be pre-defined and publicly available.
- ii. These processes will normally be expected to include:
 - a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
 - an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the member;
 - publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
 - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

The member may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. The member should pay careful attention to its declared principles at all times and should ensure both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. A member that makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each member.

Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures

The member should have in place procedures for its own accountability.

These procedures are expected to include the following:

- i. *a published policy for the assurance of its own quality, made available on its website;*
- ii. *documentation which demonstrates that:*
 - *the member's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;*
 - *the member has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, Committee/Council/Board and staff members;*
 - *the member has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;*
 - *the member has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.*

- iii. a mandatory cyclical external review of its activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.*

CHAPTER II. APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Application form and documentation

Applications for membership of ENQA shall be in the form specified by the Board (details obtainable from the Secretary General). Applications for membership are considered and decided upon by the Board on the basis either of submitted documentation alone, or of submitted documentation and a visit to the applicant body. Applications for Full Membership will only be considered where an independent external review report on the agency's conformity with the membership criteria, carried out in a manner and to a standard acceptable to the Board, is received (see 7iii above).

Candidate Membership procedure

If the Board decides, in the light of the application, that the applicant agency does not meet the above mentioned criteria for Full Membership, but is likely to be able to meet the criteria within two years of the Candidate Membership being granted, it may grant, at its discretion, Candidate Membership for a maximum of two years. At the end of that period (or sooner, if the Candidate Member so requests), the Board will require the submission of an external review report which demonstrates that the applicant meets the criteria. If, in the opinion of the Board, and following the submission of the evidence, the criteria are still not met, the application will lapse and the applicant will, by the decision of the Board, not be allowed to reapply for membership until a further period of two years has elapsed. During this period the agency will remain on the ENQA mailing list to ensure information dissemination on the activities of ENQA. If, following the request for further evidence, the Board grants Full Membership, the agency will be required to undergo an external review within five years of the date on which Candidate Membership was granted. If, however, the applying organisation does not have the intention or capacity to fulfil the Full Membership criteria, it can apply to become an Associate or Affiliate of ENQA (see Title III of the ENQA Regulations).

External reviews

As indicated in criterion 7 above, it is a condition of membership that all Full Members of ENQA undergo an external review at least once every five years. If a member does not undergo an external review within five years of Full Membership being granted or reconfirmed, it will, by decision of the General Assembly, cease to be a member of ENQA. If, as a result of an external review, a member is judged not to meet the membership criteria by the Board, it will be given two years to conform with the criteria, during which time the agency will be designated as a Candidate Member of ENQA. A further review will be carried out by the Board, or its nominated reviewers, at the end of the two-year period

(or sooner, if the member agency so requests). An agency that, in the opinion of the Board, and following the further review, remains in breach of ENQA's membership criteria will, by confirmation of the General Assembly, be debarred from ENQA. A debarred agency will be permitted to reapply for membership after a further period of two years.

Notification and Appeal

Applicants that are not accepted for membership or which are offered Candidate Membership, shall be notified of the reasons by the President of ENQA and shall be informed of the areas where the Board considers that further development or changes are required or advised. A body whose application for membership is not accepted by the Board, or which is granted Candidate, rather than Full Membership, or which is re-designated from Full Membership to Candidate Membership against its wishes, may appeal in writing to the Board, indicating why it believes the Board's decision to be wrong. Appeals should be addressed to the Secretary General. The deadline for appeals is two calendar months from the date of the notification of the Board's decision. The Board shall ask the Appeals and Complaints Committee (see article 8 of the ENQA Regulations) to review the decision, and the Board's decision on the appeal shall take into account the Committee's report. The Board's decision on appeals is final.

CHAPTER III. TRANSITIONAL MEMBERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

The Regulations describe the objectives, membership, structure and funding arrangements of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. ENQA was established on 4 November 2004 in Frankfurt, Germany when ENQA succeeded its predecessor body, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which existed from 29 March 2000 until 4 November 2004, and which itself was founded in fulfilment of Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education.

At the first General Assembly of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education held in Frankfurt, Germany, on 4 November 2004, it was agreed that the organisations that were Full Members of the Network at the point of dissolution, should be designated as Full Members of ENQA, subject to their agreeing to undergo a review, to the satisfaction of the Board, as described in the section on external reviews (under Chapter II) of the present document, within the first five years of ENQA's existence (i.e. by 19 September 2010). It was further agreed that organisations that were Associate members of the Network and that wished to continue in membership of ENQA, should be invited to make an application for Candidate Membership and be subject to the provisions of Title III, sections I and III of ENQA's Regulations and of the present document. Existing Candidate Members would continue in that category and be subject to the provisions for achieving Full Membership shown in the present document.