# MANUAL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

Version 2019

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# 1   INTRODUCTION

Under the current accreditation system, accreditation at programme level can be achieved through either a limited or an extended programme assessment. A similar option is used for new programmes: either a limited or an extended assessment of new programmes. In the case of a limited assessment, the deployment of programme staff, the available facilities and the system of quality assurance are no longer considered separately. The difference between the limited and the extended programme assessment is expressed in the different assessment frameworks formulated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*, NVAO).

In order for an institution to qualify for a limited assessment of its current or new degree programmes, it must first receive a positive assessment in an Institutional Quality Assurance Audit (ITK) conducted by NVAO. The NVAO describes the audit as follows: "if, after such a thorough investigation, NVAO determines that the quality assurance of an institution is in such good order that the quality of the programmes is systematically assessed and where necessary improved, the institution shall qualify for a different accreditation regime. In this regime, a panel of independent experts assesses a programme according to a small number of standards which relate to the core quality of teaching and learning, on which basis NVAO shall then decide whether or not to grant the programme accreditation."[1]

The second round of assessments for the Institutional Quality Assurance Audit. began in May 2017. In this round, the audit assesses the extent to which the institution's quality assurance system and associated working methods are robust and whether a sustainable quality culture has arisen within the institution. A positive assessment of all standards asserts confidence in the institution.  The second round of the audit is organized in accordance with the new Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2018.

The basic principles of VU Amsterdam's policy on the quality of teaching and learning are first outlined below. The objectives, the parties involved, and the tasks are then described. This is followed by a description of the System of Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning in place at our university. Finally, the system's quality requirements and recommendations are discussed.

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[1] Assessment framework *for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2018.*

## 2    BASIC PRINCIPLES OF VU AMSTERDAM'S POLICY ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overriding view at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is that quality of education is assured both by satisfying quality standards (performance) and by making continual improvements.

### 2.1    FRAMEWORKS FOR QUALITY OF EDUCATION

At VU Amsterdam, the approved policy on education and the quality assurance of teaching and learning have been included in the Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning (hereafter referred to as the 'Quality Manual'). The Quality Manual sets out the frameworks within which programmes and faculties implement their policy on education. All relevant quality topics are discussed in the Quality Manual. The Quality Manual follows the policy adopted by the Executive Board at the level of the institution. This policy is established in close consultation with the faculties and the Joint Assembly (*Gezamenlijke Vergadering*, GV). It goes without saying that, where applicable, the Joint Assembly's advice or permission is sought. The Quality Manual is edited by the Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management (*Onderwijsbeleid, Kwaliteitszorg en Procesregie*, OKP) within Student & Educational Affairs, and the Steering Group for Quality of Education (*Stuurgroep Onderwijskwaliteit*, STOK) makes recommendations regarding its content. The Quality Manual serves as a guide for faculties when drafting and executing their own quality assurance of teaching and learning. Internally, the Quality Manual is easily accessible through the Digital Teaching Dossier (*Digitaal Onderwijsdossier*, DOD) and VUnet, to students as well as teaching staff.[2] The Quality Manual is available in Dutch and English. Various topics relating to the quality of teaching and learning are dealt with in the Quality Manual, such as educational organization, internationalization, teaching evaluations, curriculum, work placement and thesis, lecturers' professionalization, student counselling, and examination and assessment. The Quality Manual is a dynamic document in the sense that it is continually renewed in line with the most up-to-date policy. Each chapter of the Quality Manual contains a description of the topic dealt with in that chapter, followed by the quality requirements and recommendations as formulated by VU Amsterdam with reference to that topic.

### 2.2    IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to the frameworks for quality of education reflected in the quality requirements, the prospects for improvement are also strongly emphasized in VU Amsterdam's education policy:

*The system of internal quality assurance aims to maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning and therefore addresses all topics that together determine quality. By way of comparison, a house can have a quality label that came about during its design and construction. The maintenance plan for the house aims to maintain and improve the various aspects of quality, even though these differ from each other (the maintenance plan for the heating system is different from*

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[2] Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning

*the maintenance plan for painting). A system of quality of assurance must cover the correct topics and it must operate as the driving force of improvement; it should also be clear how that driving force operates.*[3]

Through this approach, VU Amsterdam expresses the concept of quality assurance (of education) in terms of the prospects for improvement.

Improvement can be seen as the driving force of achievement. An integrated approach (Strategic Plan, faculties and services, planning & control cycle) drives the development of a sound quality culture, which helps produce results with a more lasting effect than those achieved through isolated actions.  Such an integrated approach is required in order to build an ambitious culture in which lecturers provide challenging education, the quality culture is strong and self-evident, and the organization of quality assurance is excellent. This integrated approach to the quality of teaching and learning is characteristic of the quality assurance policy at VU Amsterdam.

Although the quality culture and the associated strategy may differ between faculties and programmes, the common denominator is that there is an open dialogue about opportunities for improvement. VU Amsterdam has various tools at its disposal that can help shape this dialogue. Three important tools are the midterm review for programmes, assessing self-evaluation reports and carrying out mock inspections (see section 4.1.2). A range of guides and templates are also available, such as a template for a programme annual report, a template for a faculty annual teaching report and guides for programme committees and examination boards. Finally, training sessions and workshops are organized and a variety of networks are supported with the intention of promoting broad knowledge-sharing within VU Amsterdam.

## 2.3    RISK MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

The VU Amsterdam policy on quality of education outlined above also explicitly addresses risk management as it relates to quality of education, demonstrating that risk management and risk detection are a key part of the integrated approach to quality of education. The memorandum on Risk Management in Education[4] details:

- potential risks;
- the indicators that such risks may occur;
- the procedure to follow in the event that a risk does occur;
- those responsible, and how to guarantee that unacceptable risks are eliminated once they have been detected.

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[3] Working Group on Internal Quality Assurance (Werkgroep Interne Kwaliteitszorg, WIKZ) (2009). Zorg voor kwaliteit van het onderwijs. Deel I: Advies. [Ensuring quality in education. Part I: Recommendation.] Unpublished report. Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam.

[4] Risicomanagement onderwijs [Risk management in education], M. Karssen, 11 September 2015

The procedure for risk detection aims to safeguard the quality of education. Integrating this into the quality assurance system gives risk detection a key place in the planning and control cycle at programme, faculty and institutional level.

The memorandum on Risk Management in Education explains how VU Amsterdam organizes risk detection in education, explicitly stating that everyone involved in education is personally responsible for detecting and managing risks. The only really effective way to avoid unacceptable risks is through positive cooperation between all relevant parties. This shared involvement is also clear from the decision to make this memorandum a 'living document' to be regularly updated on the basis of experiences of risk management in education and within the programmes. For this reason, the document has been included in this chapter as an appendix.

## 3    PARTICIPANTS AND DUTIES

A quality culture must not be a hollow, abstract concept. It is people who drive improvement: lecturers and students, support staff within faculty Education Offices and central service departments, Directors of Studies with policy responsibility, portfolio holders for teaching, deans, operations directors and service department directors, members of the Executive Board and members of the Supervisory Board. The contribution of each of these individuals, in their various roles within the cycles, is indispensable for assuring and improving the quality of education at VU Amsterdam.

In Table 1, we name the individuals and bodies responsible and summarize their main tasks in the quality assurance system for teaching and learning.

*Table 1. The people and the system. Description of the function of the individuals and bodies responsible for the System of Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning at VU Amsterdam*

| INDIVIDUAL OR BODY | MAIN TASKS IN THE SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING |
|---|---|
| Supervisory Board | 1. Supervises the System of Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning.<br>2. Supervises the Executive Board's policy priorities at the institutional level of the planning & control cycle. |
| Executive Board | 1. Structures the system of quality assurance.<br>2. Adopts and maintains the vision for the quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance.<br>3. Adopts and maintains the institution-wide policy on education.<br>4. Supervises the selection and implementation of the policy priorities of the Faculty Board and the Directors of Services. |
| Joint Assembly | 1. Approves the System of Quality Assurance. |
| Directors of Services | 1. Adopt and maintain the institution-wide policy on facilities within the remit of their particular service. |
| Faculty Board/Dean | 1. Structures the faculty system of quality assurance.<br>2. Adopts and maintains the faculty vision for the quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance.<br>3. Adopts and maintains the faculty's policy on education.<br>4. Supervises the selection and implementation of the Directors of Studies' policy priorities. |
| Faculty representation | 1. Approves the faculty's system of quality assurance.<br>2. Approves specific components of the Academic and Examination Regulations (AER) (see Appendix 2 for the authorizations matrix) |
| Portfolio holder for teaching | 1. Implements the portfolio of policy on education within the faculty.<br>2. Develops and implements the faculty's policy on education.<br>3. Develops and implements the AER.<br>4. Develops and implements the faculty's quality assurance of teaching and learning.<br>5. Prepares, implements and ensures follow-up on programme re-accreditations.<br>6. Develops and realizes proposals for new programmes. |
| Examination Board | 1. Safeguards the assessment and examination policy.<br>2. Supervises the quality of assessments and examinations. |
| Programme Committee | 1. Advises, on request or on its own initiative, about quality and quality assurance in relation to education.<br>2. Approves and/or makes recommendations for specific components of the Academic and Examination Regulations (see Appendix 2 for the authorizations matrix) |
| Director of Studies | 1. Implements the faculty's policy on education for the programme.<br>2. Develops and implements the Academic and Examination Regulations within the programme.<br>3. Supervises the programme's quality assurance.<br>4. Prepares, implements and ensures follow-up on programme re-accreditations. |

# 4   SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT VU AMSTERDAM

At VU Amsterdam we take a three-level approach to the quality assurance of teaching and learning: the level of the programmes, the level of the faculties and service departments and the level of the institution as a whole. Figure 1 illustrates how the different levels interact. At each level, planning and prioritizing takes place according to a proposal from the executive layer (the upward planning arrow). Monitoring takes place on the initiative of the supervisory layer (the downward monitoring arrow).
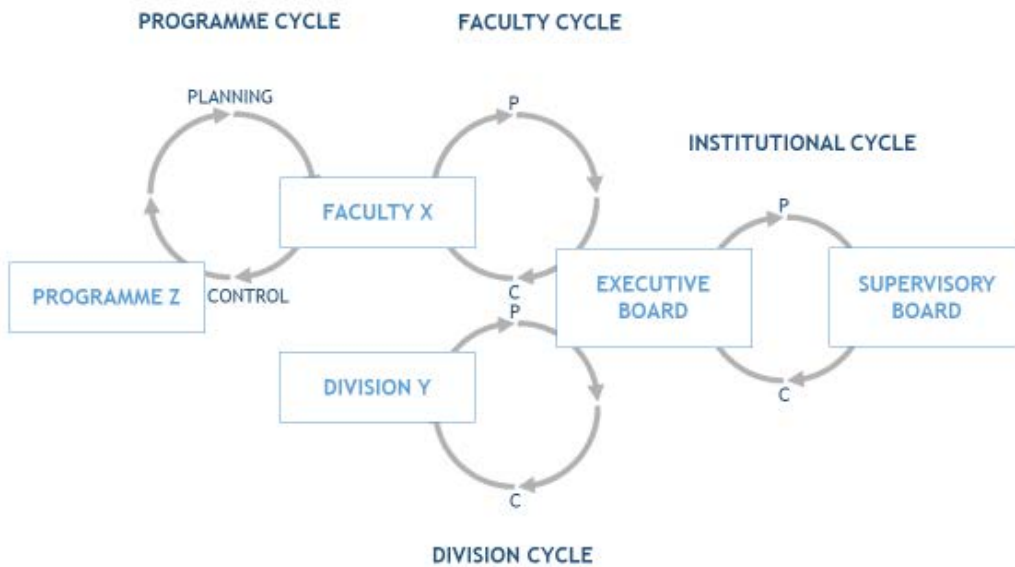


*Figure 1. Quality assurance of teaching and learning at VU Amsterdam: planning & control cycles at three levels.*

The three levels of the planning & control cycle are elaborated as follows:

1. The cycle at the level of the <u>degree programme</u>. The programme level is where education is provided and where results are achieved. Over the course of the <u>internal annual cycle</u>, programmes report on this education provision and the results and make plans for improvement. The Faculty Board approves the plans and supervises their implementation. Over the course of the <u>external six-yearly cycle</u>, programmes are re-accredited once every six years following an external inspection procedure, based on a decision from the NVAO. Since 2014, it has been standard procedure for an internal midterm review[5] to be conducted halfway through this external cycle to determine the state of affairs since the previous inspection and to assess the quality of the graduation assignments.

   *Risk detection at programme level*: the programme annual report templates include a standard section for adding a description of potential risks and the measures that have been taken or are yet to be taken. The Director of Studies discusses the programme annual report, including the risk analysis, with the portfolio holder for teaching. In addition, during the midterm review of the programme, time is explicitly scheduled to consider the risks the programme can and wishes to take, and to consider the measures the programme can take with these risks in mind.

2. The cycle at <u>the level of the faculty and services</u>**.** The focus placed on education by the Faculty Boards and the Directors of Services is primarily intended to create the preconditions for good education. Over the course of the <u>internal annual cycle</u>, faculties report on the implementation of their educational tasks and make plans to improve these tasks. The Executive Board approves the plans and is responsible for supervision.
   Since 2014, an internal assessment of the quality assurance of teaching and learning has been conducted once every three years alongside the annual cycle. The rhythm of this <u>internal three-yearly cycle</u> is such that two internal assessments take place between the recurring, six-yearly external institutional assessments. The internal three-yearly cycle takes the form of an audit at the level of the faculties and service departments.

   *Risk detection at faculty level:* The sections of the annual teaching report and the annual plan that deal with risk focus on potential risks to faculty teaching and the measures that could be taken. The faculty board discusses the annual teaching report with the Executive Board during the administrative coordination (*Bestuurlijk Overleg*, BO). The internal three-yearly cycle (audit) also considers risks to faculty teaching.

3. The cycle at <u>institutional level</u>. During the <u>internal annual cycle</u>, the Executive Board directs education policy at institutional level (as laid down in the Quality Manual) on the basis of the Strategic Plan and the associated implementation plan; it also reports on supervisory activities and makes plans to improve these activities. The Supervisory Board approves the plans and is

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[5] The structure of the midterm review can be found on VUnet.

responsible for supervision. The institution's quality assurance is assessed during the <u>external six-yearly cycle</u> at the level of the institution. The institution as a whole is re-accredited on the basis of an NVAO decision, following an inspection conducted by an external audit committee.

*Risk detection at institutional level*: the annual plan for VU Amsterdam as a whole (framework document) and its annual report include an examination of risk detection, both in general and as regards education in particular. The Executive Board discusses the annual report with the Supervisory Board.

The cycles at the level of programmes, faculties, service departments or the institution as a whole are elaborated further in the following sections.

## 4.1   QUALITY ASSURANCE AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

The programmes form the core of education at VU Amsterdam. This is where lecturers, support staff, and students work to shape education, and where the education provided by VU Amsterdam is created. Insight into results achieved by programmes is obtained using several measuring tools which are described below. These tools and their mutual relationships are represented in calendar form (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Connection between the programme cycle, faculty cycle and institutional cycle. cy=calendar year, ay=academic year.

| | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Programme committee | | | | | Annual report (ay-1) | | | | | | | |
| Examination Board | | | | | | Annual report (ay-1) | | | | | | |
| Degree programme | | | | | fact sheet: prognosis for education (1/10) | Annual report (ay-1) & annual plan (ay+1) | | | | | | Def. figures for education |
| Faculty | 4-monthly report (cy) | | | | - Annual plan (cy+1) (15/9)  - 8-monthly report (cy) (30/9) | | | Internal annual teaching report (ay-1) | | 12-monthly report (annual report) (cy-1) | | Def. figures for education |
| University | | Frame work letter | | Six-month ly report | | | Annual plan/ budget | | | | | Annual report/ accounts |
| Service department | 4-monthly report (cy) | | | | 8-monthly report (cy) | | | | | Annual report (cy-1) | | |

### 4.1.1 INTERNAL ANNUAL CYCLE AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

Each programme submits an annual report to the Faculty Board outlining the education provided and the quality of that education during the previous year. The Director of Studies is responsible for this report. A conscious distinction is made below between the *academic year* t-1/t and the *calendar year* t. Programme annual reports and programme annual plans cover *academic years (September to September)*. Faculty annual reports and annual plans cover *calendar years* (the faculty annual teaching report covers an academic year). The programme report in year t deals with academic year t-1/t. The programme annual report includes a programme annual plan which describes the resolutions for the academic year t/t+1. In autumn, the resolutions are coordinated with the Faculty Board and included in the faculty annual plan for calendar year t+1, (see below under Quality assurance at the level of the faculty and service department; see also Figure 2). The faculty annual plan is coordinated with the Executive Board during the autumn administrative consultation.

<u>Programme annual report</u>
The programme annual report is produced each autumn by the Director of Studies. There is an institution-wide format for this annual report[6], combining various different sources. The report deals with topics such as intake, transfer and outflow of students; excellence; student guidance; lecturers; teaching evaluations; processes for testing and assessment; and facilities.

When writing the programme annual report, the Director of Studies uses various sources of information: annual reports from Examination Boards and Programme Committees, teaching evaluations, information on assessments and management information. These sources of information are explained in detail below.

A key principle is that a consultation should always take place between the portfolio holder for teaching/Director of Education and the Director of Studies and, though not necessarily at the same meeting, the chair of the Programme Committee. The programme annual reports can only be effective if the risks and sticking points are discussed and the measures are monitored. An annual report should not be written simply because it has to be written, but rather to express the basic principles to be discussed.

<u>Annual reports from Examination Boards and Programme Committees</u>
Examination Boards and Programme Committees report on their work once a year. An institution-wide template[7] has been drawn up for these annual reports, which are attached to the programme annual report. The Examination Board's annual report deals with matters such as the composition and functioning of the board; guaranteeing the quality of examinations, final assignments and final degree assessments; the procedure for appointing examiners; amendments to rules and guidelines; and the assessment of examinations and final degree assessments. It also contains an overview of the appeals, complaints and requests which involved the Examination Board over the course of the year. The annual report from the Programme Committee deals with the composition and functioning of the committee and the recommendations given.

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[6] See the programme annual report template
[7] See the programme annual report template

Teaching evaluations

Teaching evaluations – especially student evaluations – are an important tool for quality assurance and improvement in education. Teaching evaluation is the systematic collection of information with the aim of gaining greater insight into the current quality of the education provided and into ways of raising quality. The primary objective of teaching evaluations is to improve education. In the first instance, this relates to the course or curriculum being evaluated, particularly using the qualitative feedback and suggestions for improvement yielded by the evaluation. Secondly, the teaching evaluations can be used to monitor the development of a trend in courses within a programme. The results of the teaching evaluations are connected to reference data from the institution and the faculty, updated on an ongoing basis. Teaching evaluations are provided by the department of Education, Quality Assurance and Process Management (OKP) within Student & Educational Affairs.

The standard student evaluation questionnaires reflect VU Amsterdam's extensive experience with the evaluation of education. However, quantitative, standardized evaluation questionnaires can only offer limited answers to the question of what concrete actions lecturers and programmes can take to improve education. The open comment boxes give students an opportunity to mention the course's positive aspects and offer suggestions for improvement. However, because that does not always produce sufficiently constructive input, VU Amsterdam is also keen to introduce additional, qualitative evaluation methods alongside the online student evaluations. The relevant chapter of the Quality Manual describes several qualitative evaluation methods and provides suggestions and examples.

The following tools are used by the programmes.

- *Course evaluations*
  Course evaluations are conducted on VUnet, where lecturers can compile their own questionnaires on the basis of standardized blocks of questions. Courses with fewer than 75 students may be evaluated on paper, in which case lecturers select the most appropriate paper questionnaire from those available on VUnet. In the case of both electronic and paper evaluations, the results of the course evaluations are fed back to the students registered for that course. The lecturer gives feedback, including his or her comments on the outcome of the evaluation. Specially designed questionnaires are used to assess work placements and Bachelor's and Master's theses.

- *Overview of course evaluations*
  The results of all teaching evaluations are included in VU Amsterdam's data warehouse. This information is used to generate various management information reports, which serve several goals including offering insight into the results for programmes, years within the programme and faculties.

- *Curriculum evaluations*
  In addition to the course evaluations, questionnaires are also administered for a study year as a whole or for entire Bachelor's or Master's programmes. These curriculum evaluations provide insight into students' opinions on aspects such as the cohesion, structure, level and guidance during the study year in question or on the programme as a whole.

Examination Service

As well as providing information on the quality of education, programmes also ensure that assessments are evaluated. The Examination Service of the Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management processes multiple choice examinations automatically. An item analysis (together with an interpretation of the results) is always supplied with the results of the examination. The item analysis of the examination provides information on the quality of the examination in general (the level of difficulty and reliability) and on the questions in particular. The information supplied by the Examination Service provides insight into the quality of the examination and supplies guidelines for improving the examination. Upon request, it is also possible to carry out an examination analysis on an examination containing open questions. Item and examination analyses constitute an important contribution to improving the quality of examinations. The Examination Service is available both for paper & pencil examinations and for electronic examinations.

Management information

The management information that is collected, recorded, and made centrally available at VU Amsterdam is also available at programme level. This information includes the following topics: educational outcomes, dropout rates, switching, intake, excellence, exchange students, examination results, National Student Survey results and the results of teaching evaluations.

- *Digital teaching dossier*
  The digital teaching dossier is a document management system developed for educational and quality assurance purposes at VU Amsterdam. The dossier is structured on four different levels: course level, programme level, faculty level and institutional level. At each of these four levels, it is possible to manually add (and delete) documents relating to the quality assurance of teaching and learning. The file also contains standard management reports offering relevant information. Any document that is considered relevant to quality assurance can be saved to the dossier; this includes any document that can be used in the internal annual cycle (annual reports and annual plans), the internal six-yearly cycle of the midterm review or the six-yearly external cycle of inspection and accreditation. The dossier makes quality assurance at VU Amsterdam more efficient, more transparent, more accessible and easier to understand for all concerned.

### 4.1.2 EXTERNAL SIX-YEARLY CYCLE AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

Current programmes

As part of the six-yearly cycle of programme assessments conducted by NVAO, various quality measurements are made which contribute to improving the educational quality of the programme. The process whereby the programme administration writes a self-evaluation report[8] generates greater understanding of the quality of the programme. The Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management supports faculties by assessing the self-evaluation report, drafting scenarios to support mock inspections and helping to prepare and conduct the external accreditation On the basis of the audit panel's assessment report, the NVAO decides whether the

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[8] There is a guide to writing a self-evaluation report (ZER) on VUnet.

programme is worthy of accreditation. Both the assessment report and the NVAO decision follow the standards for a limited programme assessment**:**

1. Intended learning outcomes: The intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the level and orientation of the degree programme and are tailored to the expectations of the professional field and the field of study, as well as to international requirements.
2. The educational learning environment: The curriculum, the learning environment and the quality of the teaching team make it possible for incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
3. Assessment: The programme has an appropriate and well-functioning assessment system.
4. Achieved learning outcomes: The degree programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.

Three tools for internal quality assurance

The mock inspection is not a compulsory part of the preparations for the inspection itself, but it is a very useful tool. A mock inspection focuses on an under-appreciated but important aspect of the accreditation process: what impression of the programme can you, as a group, give the panel? How can the programme present a realistic, believable and shared narrative to give the panel a good idea of what the programme offers?  The mock inspection is a good opportunity to practise this together and to devise concrete, appealing examples and tests. It also offers a chance to experience the image presented, both consciously and unconsciously, by the delegations as a group. A mock inspection also helps people to come together to focus on the upcoming inspection and accreditation.

The quality of the self-evaluation report (*Zelfevaluatierapport*, ZER) is an integral part of a successful inspection. That's why, before the self-evaluation is finalized, the programme receives advice about potential areas for improvement. This advice is provided by a group of readers under the central coordination of the Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management Department. VU Amsterdam has selected 'peer assessment' by 'self-evaluation consultancy group' to ensure that participants can take full advantage of – and learn from – each other's expertise. The consultancy group's assessment of the self-evaluation report has two objectives. First, improvements can be made through peer learning and by sharing expertise while reading, commenting on and discussing the self-evaluation report. Secondly, the programme is supported by sound recommendations from a variety of perspectives from outside the programme/faculty in question. The product of the process is a set of recommendations for ways to improve the definitive version of the self-evaluation report.

Since 2014, it has been standard procedure for each programme to conduct a midterm review halfway through the six-yearly accreditation cycle. A committee, which must include members with external domain expertise and internal process expertise, visits the programme and reports to the Director of Studies and the Faculty Board. The committee reports both on the possibilities for improvement and on the extent to which the programme has managed to accommodate the recommendations made in the inspection report from the previous accreditation process.

Following a midterm review, actions are taken to better manage risks and to improve the programme. In this sense, the midterm review forms part of the integrated system of risk management. Reports on the follow-up actions for improvement are monitored annually and included in the programme's annual report. The midterm review report is intended for internal use and is not shared as part of the external programme accreditation. This is intended to create the best conditions to achieve the

improvement goals outlined in the midterm review, for which those concerned are asked to be open and transparent. The report's main focus is on making improvements in areas where the panel has identified risks or opportunities for improvement (in line with the goals of the midterm review). Naturally, the self-evaluation report for the external inspection committee contains a reflection on the midterm review and its results.

New programmes

For new programmes, the faculty concerned must first submit a memorandum of intent to the VU Inter-Board Consultative Platform (Bestuurlijk Overleg VU, BOVU; consisting of the Deans and the Executive Board) for approval; this process should consider the desirability of the new programme within the context of the current programmes offered by VU Amsterdam. In the case of a budgeted programme, the final decision by the Executive Board is followed by a macro efficiency application submitted to the Minister by way of the Committee for Efficiency in Higher Education (Commissie Doelmatigheid Hoger Onderwijs, CDHO). Subsequently, the Executive Board submits a proposal for initial accreditation of the programme (Toets Nieuwe Opleiding, TNO) to NVAO. The Quality of Education Steering Group (Stuurgroep Onderwijskwaliteit, STOK) advises the Executive Board about each application for a new Bachelor's or Master's programme which VU Amsterdam intends to submit to NVAO. The Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management supports the steering group in forming an opinion.

## 4.2    QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF FACULTY AND SERVICE DEPARTMENT

### 4.2.1    INTERNAL ANNUAL CYCLE AT THE LEVEL OF FACULTY AND SERVICE DEPARTMENT

During the internal annual cycle, the Faculty Boards and Directors of Studies implement their educational policy at the level of the faculties (teaching) and of the service departments (creating the preconditions for good education); they also report on this implementation and make plans to improve their teaching tasks. The Faculty Boards and Service Directors consult with the Executive Board in meetings known as Administrative Consultations (*Bestuurlijke overleggen*, BOs) and Portfolio Holders' Consultations (*Portefeuillehouderoverleggen*, POs). Administrative Consultations take place twice a year, in the spring (second half of March) and autumn (second half of October). The entire Executive Board and the entire Faculty Board (for a faculty) or management team (for a service department) come together for these discussions. There are also additional twice-yearly consultations between the Faculty Board and the Rector Magnificus, and the portfolio holder from the Executive Board holds regular progress update consultations with the Service Directors.

The faculty cycle commences with the framework document in May-June of year t-1. Subsequently, in August-September of year t-1, the faculty drafts an annual plan and budget. The plan is adopted at the autumn consultation between the faculty and the Executive Board. During year t, the faculty reports on the state of affairs every four months (the four-/eight-/twelve-monthly reports). The eight-monthly report is discussed at the Administrative Consultation, together with the annual plan and the budget. The twelve-monthly report (annual report) is discussed in the spring at the first Administrative Consultation. This consultation focuses in particular on the faculty's annual teaching report and annual plan. Figure 2 illustrates the internal annual cycle. As shown, the priorities of all programmes in the faculties for the academic year t/t+1 are included in the annual plan.

Reports

Key elements of the faculty or service department cycle include the annual plan (discussed at the autumn consultation) and the 12-monthly report including the annual teaching report (discussed at the spring consultation). Both reports dedicate a chapter to teaching, which discusses the qualitative and quantitative indicators relating to Bachelor's, Master's and postgraduate teaching. This chapter also contains a section which reports specifically on the quality assurance of teaching and learning. In addition, the accreditation portrait for each faculty is an important aspect reported at the Administrative and Portfolio Holders' Consultations. This report discusses the state of affairs with reference to programme inspections and the findings of the midterm reviews.

Alongside the programme annual reports, the input for the faculty's reports to the Executive Board derives from the management information. The results of the National Student Survey and information from student panels are also used.

Support

At university level, the service departments for Finance, Planning & Control, Administrative Affairs, Student & Educational Affairs and HRM-AM are the supply services involved in preparing the consultations and in monitoring the agreements. The staff within these Services think pro-actively about which topics might be relevant for discussion at the consultations, and provide the Executive Board with integrated recommendations prior to each round of Administrative Consultations. Administrative Affairs coordinates and has the final say in drawing up the agenda and finalizing the agreements.

At the level of the faculties, the faculty Education Office provides support for the preparation and implementation of the curriculum and for the application of the faculty system of quality assurance of teaching and learning.

### 4.2.2 INTERNAL THREE-YEARLY CYCLE AT FACULTY LEVEL

An internal audit is conducted at faculty level every three years. An internal audit committee assesses the system of quality assurance on behalf of the Executive Board. For the framework to be used for the quality assurance of education, the committee bases its deliberations on the four standards for the institutional audit as formulated by NVAO (see institutional level, Table 3). Aspects of the assessment have been formulated on the basis of these standards by translating the NVAO standards to the level of the faculty and using an interpretation applied more specifically to VU Amsterdam.

## 4.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

At the level of the institution, the Strategic Plan is a perennial planning document for the course and strategy of VU Amsterdam. The guiding principles for VU Amsterdam are laid down in the Strategic Plan. Each year the targets stated in this plan are given more concrete form in the Education Agenda. The annual planning at the level of the institution is set out below.

### 4.3.1   INTERNAL ANNUAL CYCLE

The institutional cycle also starts with the <u>framework document</u> in June of year t-1. The <u>annual plan</u> and <u>budget</u> are then drafted and adopted in September-December of year t-1.

After six months and at the end of the year, the Executive Board produces the <u>annual report </u>to provide a full report to the Supervisory Board on the activities contained in the annual plan. In the six-monthly report, the state of affairs as regards content is described at the level of VU Amsterdam. The annual report is a complete account of the previous year.

<u>Reports</u>
Important components of the institutional cycle are the framework document, the annual plan, the budget, the six-monthly report and the twelve-monthly report (annual report). In addition, twice a year, the Executive Board reports to the Quality Committee of the Supervisory Board on the state of affairs with reference to the programme inspections by means of an accreditation portrait.

The reports are compiled using the Strategic Plan and contain indicators that monitor not only the business operation of VU Amsterdam but also the substantive progress of teaching and learning and research. These reports are based on management information. The accreditation portrait is delivered to the Executive Board twice a year by Student & Educational Affairs/Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management Department, and is discussed at both the Consultative Body for Portfolio Holders for Teaching and the VU University Amsterdam Inter-Board Consultative Platform.

<u>Consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Board</u>
The Supervisory Board receives information about education as part of the regular planning & control cycle. The Supervisory Board discusses the six-monthly report in autumn and approves the annual plan and budget for the coming year. In spring, the annual report for the previous year is submitted to the Supervisory Board for approval and includes the developments and results in the field of teaching and learning. Specific important, institution-wide developments concerning education are also placed separately on the agenda for the consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Board, such as the performance agreements, the outcomes of the National Student Survey and the accreditation portrait.

<u>Support</u>
The service departments for Finance, Planning & Control, Administrative Affairs, Student & Educational Affairs and HRM-AM are the supply services involved in preparing the reports and consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Board, and in monitoring the agreements. The staff within these service departments think pro-actively about which topics might be relevant for discussion in a report or consultation, and provide the Executive Board with integrated recommendations prior to each round of Administrative Consultations. Additionally, Administrative Affairs coordinates and has the final say in drawing up the agenda and finalizing the agreements.

### 4.3.2   EXTERNAL SIX-YEARLY CYCLE AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Once every six years, each institution of higher education in the Netherlands is subject to an institutional audit. The second round of institutional audits began in 2017. The NVAO's assessment

framework 2018[9] states that the Institutional Quality Assurance Audit shall establish whether the institution can demonstrate that its internal quality assurance system, together with the quality culture, ensures that the institution's vision for quality teaching is achieved. The core principle in the second round of the audit is the institution's clear, shared, demonstrable vision for quality teaching. The audit does not assess the vision itself. The institution is autonomous and develops its own vision for quality teaching, which must be in line with the expectations and requirements of the professional field, peers, students and society. The institution and its lecturers and students express and develop this vision with an outward-looking focus and in consultation with a wider societal network.

To this end, NVAO has developed an assessment framework based on four standards which are expressed in Table 2. These four standards, therefore, also serve as the basis for the assessment framework for the internal three-yearly cycle at the faculty level.

*Table 2. NVAO Assessment Framework for Institutional Quality Assurance Audits*

| | STANDARD | ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Vision and policy | The institution has a vision of teaching and learning which enjoys broad support, as well as a supplementary policy focused on the internal quality assurance of its teaching. |
| 2. | Implementation | The institution effectively demonstrates its vision of teaching and learning; this vision is clearly expressed in its policy actions and processes, especially in terms of personnel, assessment, facilities and students with a disability. |
| 3. | Evaluation and monitoring | The institution systematically evaluates whether it is on course to achieve the intended policy aims regarding quality of education and engages relevant stakeholders with this evaluation. |
| 4. | Development | The institution is focused on development and systematically works to improve the education provided. |

*The audit committee provides a balanced and motivated opinion on each of these four standards on a three-point scale: meets the standard, does not meet the standard, or partially meets the standard. The audit commission subsequently provides a reasoned final opinion on the question of whether the institution is 'in control' of the quality of its programmes. This opinion is also based on a three-point scale: positive, negative, or conditionally positive.*

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[9] NVAO (2018). Assessment framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2018]. The Hague: NVAO.

# 5  QUALITY REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1  GENERAL

Requirements

1. The Quality Manual serves as a guide for drafting and implementing the quality assurance of teaching and learning.
2. Quality Assurance at VU Amsterdam is characterized by an integrated approach and is in line with the university-wide risk management system.
3. It is the responsibility of the managers and directors to ensure a robust quality culture within which individual professionals and students feel appreciated and are inspired to deliver high quality. This culture is in keeping with a culture of taking responsibility, mutual trust and a willingness to hold each other accountable.
4. All documents relating to the quality assurance of teaching and learning are stored in the digital teaching dossier (DOD), namely the documents used in the internal annual cycle (annual reports and annual plans), the internal six-yearly cycle of the midterm review and the six-yearly external cycle of inspection and accreditation.
5. Training for new members of Examination Boards and regular consultations between Examination Boards.
6. Training for new members of Programme Committees, both teaching staff and students.
7. Evaluation of the planning & control cycle.

Recommendations

1. Training for quality assurance staff and other individuals or bodies in the system.
2. Communication on how the system of quality assurance operates at the levels of the programmes, the faculties and service departments and the institution.

## 5.2  PROGRAMMES

Requirements

1. Before 1 November, the Director of Studies drafts a programme annual report on the previous academic year. As this report is written in parallel with the annual report of the Programme Committee and the annual report of the Examination Board, adequate exchange of information between the different parties is indispensable. A template is available for these three reports; if this template is followed closely, all the important topics will be included. It goes without saying that Programme Committees, Examination Boards and Directors of Studies are free to add additional points as they see fit.
2. The annual reports of the Examination Board and the Programme Committee are attached as appendices to the programme annual report.
3. This annual report, including the annual reports of the Programme Committee and the Examination Board, also contains the annual plan for the coming academic year. In consultation with the Faculty Board, the programme has until February 1 to refine the annual plan.
4. A risk section is included as standard in the programme annual report.

5. An external programme assessment (programme accreditation) is conducted every six years. Programmes ensure that the necessary documents concerning the programme accreditations are ready on time and organize the inspection procedure.
6. A midterm review is held halfway through the external programme assessment period.
7. Directors of Studies are responsible for organizing teaching evaluations. Evaluations should be conducted as stipulated in the evaluation plan and lecturers and students should receive feedback.
8. Directors of Studies are responsible for organizing the curriculum evaluations.
9. The Director of Studies is responsible for ensuring that statistical management information is discussed in the proper forum.

## 5.3 PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

*Requirements*

1. Before 1 November, the Programme Committee drafts an annual report on the previous academic year. This annual report is attached as an appendix to the programme annual report.
2. The matters covered in this annual report include the duties of the Programme Committee, namely:
   a. Advising on and approving the Academic and Examination Regulations;
   b. Assessing the implementation of the Academic and Examination Regulations;
   c. Discussing the results and measures for improvement arising from the teaching evaluations.

## 5.4 EXAMINATION BOARD

Requirements

1. Before 1 November, the Examination Board drafts an annual report on the previous academic year. This annual report is attached as an appendix to the programme annual report.
2. The matters covered in this annual report include the duties of the Examination Board, namely:
   a. Safeguarding the quality of examinations, theses and final degree assessments;
   b. Appointing examiners;
   c. Amending rules and guidelines;
   d. Assessing examinations and final degree assessments;
   e. Providing a summary of appeals and complaints that have been considered by the Examination Board.

## 5.5 FACULTIES

Requirements

1. The programme annual report is discussed with the Director of Studies and within the faculty's management team. The programme annual reports and the discussion of these reports constitute the input for the faculty annual plan and the faculty annual teaching report.
2. Before 1 October, the dean drafts a faculty annual plan for the coming calendar year. The faculty annual plan is discussed in November at the autumn Administrative Consultation. The implementation of the adopted annual plan is subsequently checked according to the four-/eight-/twelve-monthly reports that are drafted and discussed during the subsequent calendar year.

3. Before 1 January, the dean drafts the faculty annual report on teaching and learning for the previous academic year. A template is available for this annual report, which is required to include an aggregation of the programme annual reports.
4. A risk section is included as standard in the faculty annual teaching report. This risk section is an aggregate of the greatest risks arising from the risk sections of the programme annual reports.
5. The faculty annual teaching report is then included in its entirety in the faculty's annual report (12-monthly report) concerning the past calendar year, and has a broader scope than exclusively education. The 12-monthly report must be submitted no later than 1 March, and is discussed at the spring Administrative Consultation.
6. Internal audits are conducted in the period between two external institutional audits in order to determine the state of affairs within the faculty. Faculties participate in these interim audits and supply the required documents.
7. Participation in the administrative consultative structure.
8. Drafting, adopting, and distributing the faculty quality assurance policy. The Quality Manual serves as a guideline.

## 5.6 SERVICE DEPARTMENTS

Requirements

1. Before 1 October, the Service Director drafts an annual plan for the coming calendar year. The annual plan is discussed in November at the autumn Administrative Consultation. The implementation of the adopted annual plan is subsequently checked according to the four-/eight-/twelve-monthly reports that are drafted and discussed during the subsequent calendar year.
2. Before 1 March, the Service Director drafts an annual report (twelve-monthly report) on the previous calendar year. This annual report is discussed at the spring Administrative Consultation.
3. Internal audits are conducted in the period between two external institutional audits in order to determine the state of affairs within the service department. Service departments participate in these interim audits and supply the required documents.
4. Participation in the administrative consultative structure.

## 5.7 INSTITUTION

Requirements
Documents for the planning & control cycle are supplied on time and are discussed in the proper forum. This concerns the Strategic Plan, framework document, semi-annual report, annual plan (including the budget) and annual report (including the annual accounts).

A selection of guides and templates are also made available to faculties for the faculty planning & control cycle, such as a template for a programme annual report, a template for a faculty annual teaching report and guides for programme committees and examination boards.

The accreditation portrait is supplied on time and discussed twice a year by the Executive Board and subsequently by the Supervisory Board.

An external institutional audit is conducted every six years. The Executive Board is responsible for ensuring that the required documents concerning the institutional audit are ready on time and for organizing the inspection procedure.

Participation in the administrative consultative structure.

# 6  APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Memorandum on Risk Management in Education (living document) (DUTCH)

Appendix 2: Authorizations matrix for consultation on the Academic and Examination Regulations (DUTCH)

Appendix 3: VU Amsterdam instrument for internal quality assurance: mock inspection

Appendix 4: VU Amsterdam instrument for internal quality assurance: self-evaluation report consultancy group

Appendix 5: VU Amsterdam instrument for quality assurance: midterm review