



# Accreditation and Quality of Study Programmes in Flanders



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## Contents

- Quality Assurance in higher education
- Developments in Flanders: from programme evaluation
  - over accreditation
  - to institution review
- What about joint programmes ?



# QA in European Higher Education

- Before the 80ties: individual initiatives, no real general policy
- Some historic factors:
  - More students in higher education
  - Economic crisis; less governmental financing
  - Governments want to control the use of financing



# QA in European Higher Education

- External factors have exercised the strongest influence
- Pioneering countries: The United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Denmark
- Countries as Belgium followed these models (esp. The Netherlands)



## Functions of QA in Education

- Improvement and warrant of quality: 'peers' evaluate and give recommendations
- Accountability towards the government and the clients (students, parents, employers)
- Regulation and adaptation of the educational system: QA indicators can influence rationalisation decisions,...



## QA has different subjects

- Research: in the Netherlands, Flanders
- A study programme (e.g. physics); all institutions at the same time
- A cluster of similar programmes (possible future development)
- A whole institution (e.g. EUA in Macedonia), our new institutional review

## Internal and external QA

- Internal: for use in and organised by the institution: e.g. student questionnaires, study time measurement, new Ghent system (Ergo)
- External: evaluations, recommendations are made by an external panel





## Current quality perspective: guaranteeing basic standards

- Basic standards on several important (educational) aspects have to be met
- QA focus upon the output
- Link with accreditation

## QA in Flanders

Central element in the startup:  
Decree on universities (June 12th, 1991)  
Art 122 Imposes a continuous monitoring  
of the quality of education: internal and  
external QA are mentioned



## Decree on Higher Education (April 2nd, 2003)

- Introduction of the bachelor/master structure
- Obligation of Quality Assurance is repeated
- Introduction of Accreditation:  
condition for organisation of programmes



## Chronologically

- Visitations: external programme evaluations (1991- 2004)
- Second generation visitations: linked with accreditation (2004- 2015.....)
- Institution review + internal management of programmes (2016)



## More specific

- Visitations were organised by the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR, representing all the universities)
  - VLIR is ENQA member and EQAR-registered
  - To satisfy ENQA criteria (independence) a new organisation was the merge of VLIR and VLHORA (similar organisation for university colleges)=> VLUHR: task: programme evaluation
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- Programme evaluation is organised in clusters
  - E.g. visitation of Biology: 1 (extended) panel for 5 Flemish biology programmes (ba + ma) + related, such as ma Nematology
  - The panel can compare the programmes after having read the self evaluation reports and having visited the programmes
  - The visitation report contains a report per programme and a comparative part
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## External QA: peer review of study programmes

- 8 year cycle
- A panel of experts judges the programme
- Result:
  - a public report on all the important issues
  - a related score list (comparison between institutions is possible)
  - recommendations for **improvement**



## External QA: peer review (visitations)

Phases in the process:

- 1 .The programme writes a **self assessment report**. Professors, assistant professors, students, alumni,... are all involved. A manual with guidelines is strictly followed.





## External QA: Visitations (peer review)

2. - A **commission of experts** is composed, on the proposal of the programmes involved. They act on a completely independent base.
  - Experts in the subject matter; 5 persons, 1 president, 1 didactical expert



## External QA: peer review (visitations)

3. The commission reads the self assessment report.

4. - **Site visit**: 2,5 days

- meetings with professors, assistant professors, other personnel involved in education, students, alumni, study guidance,...



## External QA: peer review (visitations)

5. The commission writes a **report** containing their evaluation of the programme, recommendations, good practices,...

The different programmes are also compared.



## External QA: peer review (visitations)

6. - The report is published and can be consulted by future students, newspapers, other institutions, ...
  - The Minister of Education gets a report.
7. The programmes react upon the recommendations and can make adaptations to the study programme.



## Accreditation: a second generation of external QA (from 2004)

Antecedents: societal evolutions

- Internationalisation: cooperation; mobility of professors and students
- Globalisation: a market for research and study programs emerges
- Liberalisation: commercial suppliers can organise education
- Evolution towards a knowledge society



## Accreditation: definition

A formal, public judgement made by an independent body, based upon an evaluation of quality, guaranteeing that basic standards are met



## Functions of accreditation

- Guarantee a certain basic quality of institutions or programmes
- Reinforce the existing forms of QA e.g. by strengthening their sanctioning capacity
- Create more standardisation of norms, procedures and criteria, to enhance comparability
- Improve the public responsibility function of QA by giving transparent info to students, parents,...

- The visitation process is still there
  - The cyclus (8 years) remains the same
  - The accreditation (and its report) is superimposed on the visitation
  - The accreditation organisation (NVAO) controls if the evaluation agency did its job.
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## Subjects in the self assessment, required for accreditation

1. Aims and objectives
2. Programme
3. Personnel
4. Infrastructure and services
5. Internal quality assurance
6. Results: level and output



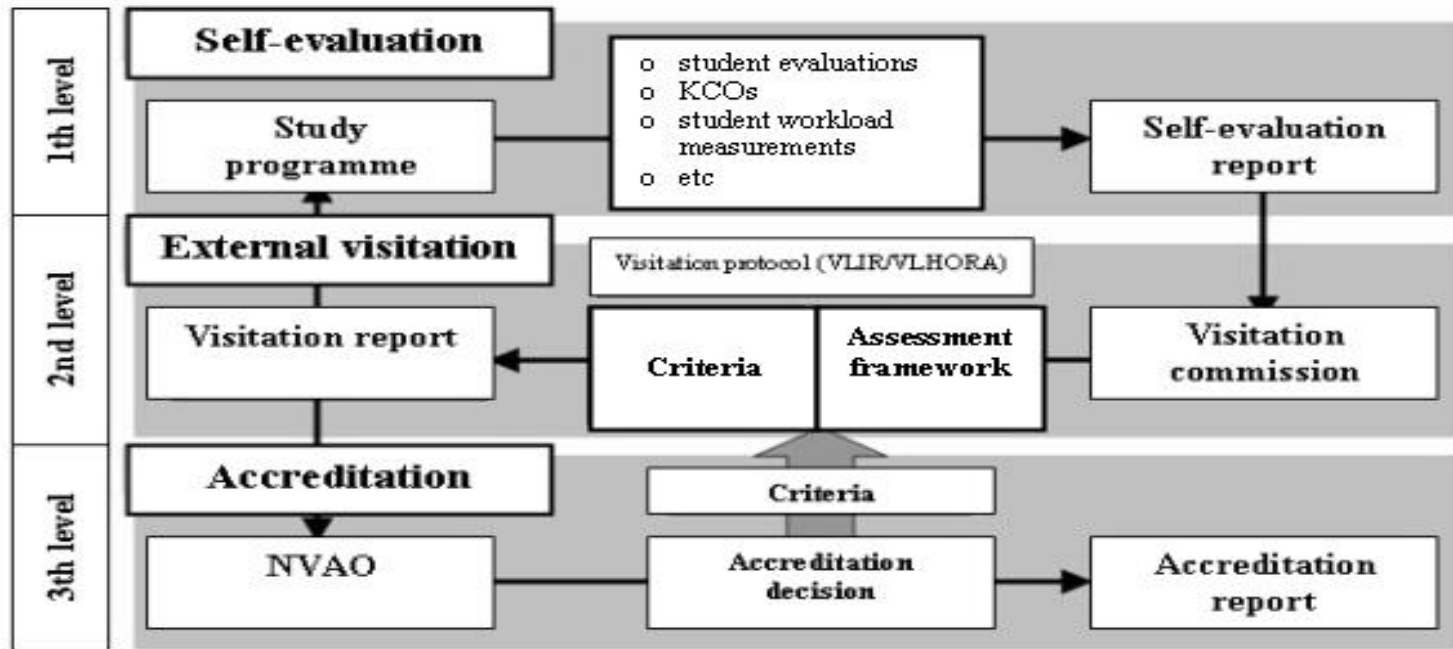
## Accreditation

- The report written by the commission of experts is the primordial document in the accreditation procedure.
- A supranational body (Netherlands-Flemish Community: NVAO) provides accreditation.
- Positive accreditation is imperative on the further existence of the programme.



# Educational quality assurance: summary

## Quality Assurance in Flanders





## Decree 6/07/2012

- Introduction of the **institution review (IR)**, from 2015-16 on, organised by NVAO
  - Initially IR and programme reviews were to coincide until the institution gets a positive evaluation
  - Once this is accomplished, accreditation of programmes would be based on a file, no longer ext evaluation, per programme
  - This would cause a huge burden for all those involved in educational quality
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- The combination of institution review and programme accreditation as it was, was rejected by the higher education institutions
- A new decree was made (June 2015) that made it possible for institutions to evaluate their programmes themselves (no longer externally)
- UGent: peer learning visits (UGent) colleagues look at the programme
- All the programmes fill out an electronic portfolio
- In its first phase of implementation



## New system for external accreditation:

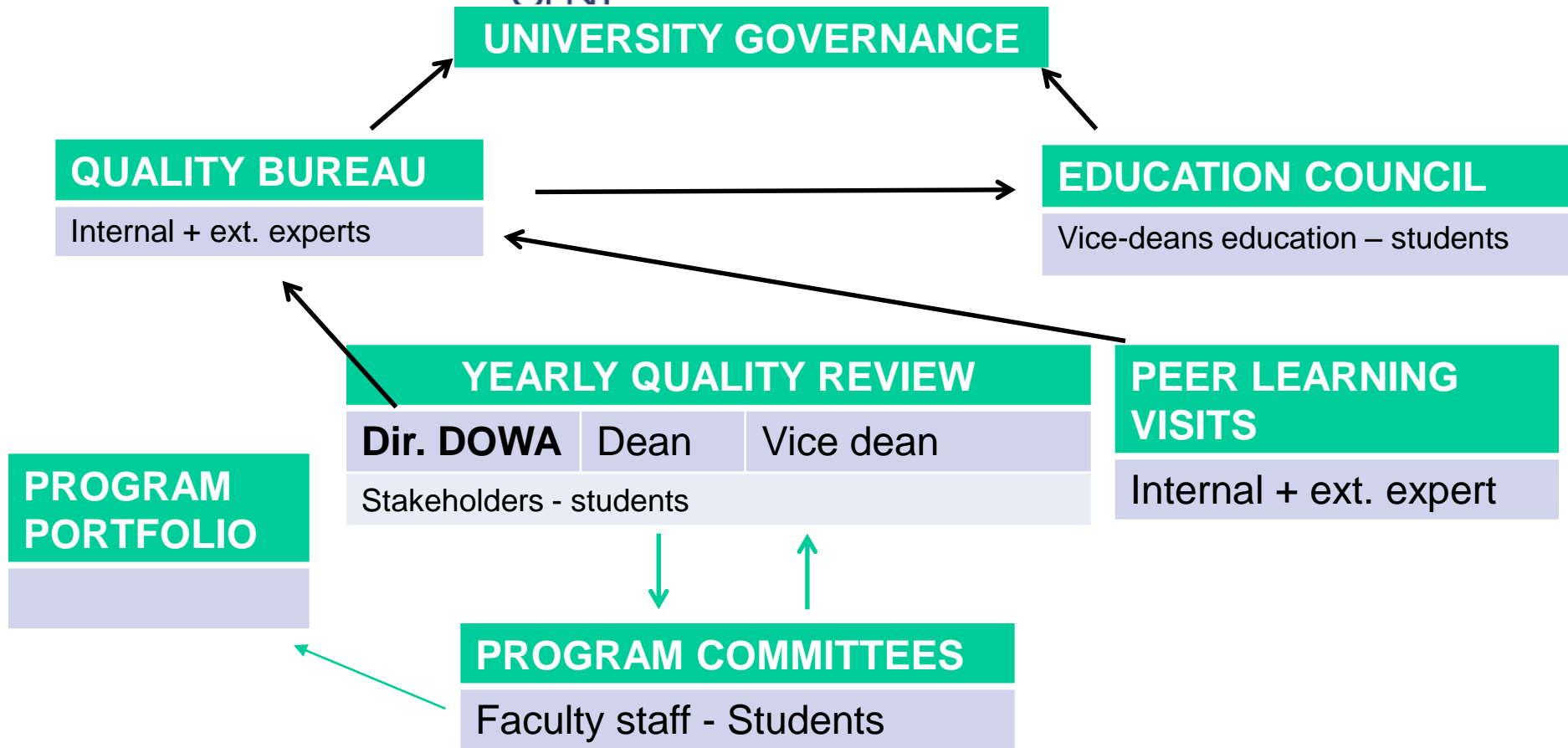
- ▶ Institution review (starts in 2016; UGent visit in April 2016)
  - Is the university in control of the quality of its programmes?
  - Does the university prepare the students for the problems of the future?
  - Is the PDCA-cycle closed?
  - Who is responsible for the quality of the programmes? Does the university have the means to monitor the quality and does it have the tools and authority to intervene if necessary
- ▶ First round of institution review has no impact BUT public opinion & reputation
- ▶ 2019-2020 : in case of negative review university could face budget cuts and loose the right to issue diplomas
- ▶ Future? Institutional accreditation ???!



## Content self evaluation IR and evaluation criteria

1. Vision on education and its quality, and policy toward educational quality
  2. Policy implementation: actions, procedures, practices -> proof of the quality culture
  3. Evaluation and monitoring: feedback and evaluation of the policy implementation
  4. Improvement policy: based on monitoring results
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## Structures in quality assurance

- Central: Office for educational quality assurance
- Faculty level: 11 quality cells containing: some professors (one director of education per faculty), one full staff member, some students, one or more administrative member

## Specific: international programmes

- An international programme is subject to the legislation of the participating countries
- EQAR website: “the full recognition of formal outcomes resulting from a single external quality assurance procedure often remains a cumbersome and bureaucratic process.”
- All our programmes need a Flemish evaluation and accreditation
- Some of our programmes participated in the JOQAR project: 1 agency, 1 evaluation for all the institutions



- The JOQAR project showed that it still wasn't easy to organise 1 evaluation valid in all participating countries
- Some accreditation organisations have agreed to mutually recognise each other's decisions, but the number of organisations remains small
- [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR\\_2010-2013](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR_2010-2013)
- 2015: European ministers signed the European Approach for joint programmes, including the standards and procedures to use
- The problem is an ongoing issue



Thanks

Any Questions ?

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