# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 3

2. ASSUMPTIONS OF VU UNIVERSITY’S POLICY ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ......................... 3

   2.1 PERFORMANCE ................................................................................................................................... 3

   2.2 IMPROVEMENTS ................................................................................................................................ 4

3. OBJECTIVES, THE PARTIES INVOLVED, AND TASKS ...................................................................................... 5

4. SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT VU UNIVERSITY ............................... 7

   4.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF THE PROGRAMME .................................................................. 8

   4.1.1 Internal annual cycle at the level of the programme ........................................................................ 10

   4.1.2 External Fixed Yearly Cycle at the Level of the Programme ............................................................ 12

   4.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF THE FACULTIES AND THE SERVICES ................................. 13

   4.2.1 Internal Annual Cycle at the Level of the Faculties and Services ..................................................... 13

   4.2.2 Internal three-year cycle at the level of the Faculty ......................................................................... 15

   4.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF THE INSTITUTION ............................................................... 15

   4.3.1 Internal Annual Cycle ..................................................................................................................... 15

   4.3.2 External Six-yearly Cycle at the Level of the Institution ................................................................. 16

5. QUALITY REQUIREMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS ....................................................................................... 18

   5.1 GENERAL ........................................................................................................................................... 18

   5.2 PROGRAMMES .................................................................................................................................... 18

   5.3 PROGRAMME COMMITTEE ................................................................................................................. 19

   5.4 EXAMINATION COMMITTEE ............................................................................................................... 19

   5.5 FACULTIES ....................................................................................................................................... 20

   5.6 SERVICES ....................................................................................................................................... 21

   5.7 INSTITUTION .................................................................................................................................... 21
1. INTRODUCTION

As from the beginning of 2011 the accreditation system for higher education in the Netherlands was amended. From this date accreditation at programme level can be rendered either in the form of a limited or in the form of an extended programme assessment. For new programmes a similar option is in force: a limited or an extended assessment of a new programme. The extended programme assessment and the extended new programme assessment are more or less similar to the usual assessment of programmes conducted by assessment committees which was in force until recently. In the case of a limited assessment, deployment of programme staff, the available facilities, and the system of quality assurance are no longer considered separately (NVAO, 2010a). The difference between the limited and the extended programme assessment is expressed in the different assessment frameworks formulated by the Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie [Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders], (henceforth abbreviated as NVAO).

If an institution aspires to qualifying for a limited assessment of its current or of new study programmes, an institutional audit first needs to be performed by NVAO, with positive outcome. The NVAO worded the amendment to the system 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 improved if necessary, the institution qualifies for a different accreditation regime. In this regime an assessment panel, consisting of independent experts, assesses a programme on a small number of standards that relate to the core of the quality of teaching and learning, on the basis of which NVAO either renders the programme accreditation, or not” (NVAO, 2010b; page 6).

Below, the assumptions of VU University’s policy on the quality of teaching and learning are outlined. Subsequently, the objectives, the parties involved, and the tasks are described. This is followed by a description of the System of Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning in place at our university. Finally, the quality requirements and recommendations of the system are dealt with.

2. ASSUMPTIONS OF VU UNIVERSITY’S POLICY ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The prevalent opinion at VU University is that quality of teaching and learning is delivered by complying with performance criteria on the one hand and by continuously working on improvement on the other.

2.1 PERFORMANCE

The performance perspective is expressed most clearly in our Institutional Plan. At VU University, the approved policy on education and the quality assurance of teaching and learning are ultimately included in the Manual for Quality of Teaching and Learning, Quality Manual for short.
The Quality Manual outlines the frameworks within which programmes and Faculties execute their policy on education. All the relevant quality themes are discussed in the Quality Manual. The Quality Manual follows the Policy on Education that is adopted by the Executive Board at the level of the institution. This policy is established in close consultation with the Faculties and the Gezamenlijke Vergadering (GV) [joint assembly]. It goes without saying that where applicable, advice or permission of the GV is sought. The Quality Manual is edited by the Department of Onderwijs en Kwaliteitszorg (OKZ) [teaching and learning and quality assurance] of Student- en Onderwijszaken [student and teaching affairs], and the Stuurgroep Onderwijskwaliteit (STOK) [quality of teaching and learning steering group] offers advice as regards 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 VUnet, also for students 1. 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 organisation, internationalisation, educational assessments, curriculum, work placement and thesis, professionalisation of lecturers, student counselling, and examination and assessment. The Quality Manual is a dynamic document in the sense that it is renewed continuously in accordance with the most up-to-date policy. Each chapter of the Quality Manual contains a description of the theme dealt with in that chapter, followed by the quality requirements and recommendations as formulated by VU University with reference to this theme.

2.2 IMPROVEMENTS

Alongside the performance perspective, the improvements perspective is also expressed in our Policy on Education:

VU University has interpreted and defined the concepts of quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance as follows. Quality of teaching and learning refers to issues such as the quality of the facilities, courses, examinations, programmes, lecturers, organisation, and counselling. The accreditation framework of the NVAO does justice to this multidimensionality, and for VU University, it formed the assumptions for substantiating its concept of quality of teaching and learning.

The concept quality assurance is of a different order. The system of internal quality assurance aims at maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning and, therefore, addresses all topics that together determine quality. Thus, 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 at maintaining and improving the different aspects of quality, even though these are different from each other (the maintenance plan for the heating system is different to the maintenance plan for

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1 Handboek Onderwijskwaliteit / Manual for Quality of Teaching and Learning
painting). A system of quality assurance must cover the correct topics and it must operate as the driving force of improvement; how the driving force operates should also be visible.²

In so doing, VU University places the concept of quality assurance (of education) within the improvement perspective.

3. OBJECTIVES, THE PARTIES INVOLVED, AND TASKS

It is clear that the performance and improvement perspectives are complementary. Indeed, improvements are the propelling force though which performance is achieved. Through an integrated approach (Institutional Plan, Faculties and Services, planning & control cycle) the development of a propelling force of improvement is realised, by which results with a more lasting effect can be obtained than through isolated actions. It is this integrated approach to the quality of teaching and learning which is characteristic of the quality assurance policy at VU University.

The propelling force of improvement is the agent of the continuous and thorough improvement of education at our university. But the propelling force of improvement is operated by people: lecturers and students, support personnel at Faculty Onderwijsbureaus (education centres) and central Services, Programme Directors responsible for policy, Portfolio Holders of Education, Deans, Directors of Business Operations and Directors of Services, members of the Executive Board and of the Supervisory Council. The contribution of each of these individuals, in their various roles and within the cycles, is indispensable for the assurance and improvement of the quality of education at VU University.

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

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Table 1. The individuals 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 University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals or Body</th>
<th>Main Tasks in the System of Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Supervises policy priorities of the Executive Board at the level of the institution of the planning &amp; control cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Board</td>
<td>1. Structures the system of quality assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adopts and maintains the view on the quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Adopts and maintains the institution-wide Policy on Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Supervises the choice and execution of the policy priorities of the Board of the Faculty and the Directors of Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Assembly</td>
<td>1. Approves the System of Quality Assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Services</td>
<td>1. Adopts and maintains the institution-wide policy on facilities in the field of a particular service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of the Faculty/Dean</td>
<td>1. Structures the Faculty System of Quality Assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adopts and maintains the Faculty’s view on the quality of teaching and learning and quality assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Adopts and maintains the Faculty’s Policy on Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Supervises the choice and execution of the policy priorities of the Programme Directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Representation</td>
<td>1. Approves the Faculty’s System of Quality Assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Approves the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio Holder of Education</td>
<td>1. Executes the portfolio of Policy on Education in the Faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Develops and executes the Faculty’s Policy on Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Develops and executes the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Develops and executes the Faculty’s Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Prepares, executes, and attends to after-care of re-accreditations of programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Develops and realises proposals for new programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination Committee</td>
<td>1. Executes the test and examination policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Supervises the quality of tests and examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Committee</td>
<td>1. Advises on the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER), the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality assurance of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme Director</td>
<td>1. Executes the Faculty’s Policy on Education for the programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Develops and executes the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) of the programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Quality assurance of the programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. SYSTEM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT VU UNIVERSITY

At VU University we chose a three-level approach to the quality assurance of teaching and learning: the level of the programmes, the level of the Faculties and Services, and the level of the institution as a whole. Figure 1 illustrates how the different levels interact. At each level, planning and prioritising takes place according to a proposal of the executive layer (the upward pointing planning arrow). Control takes place on the initiative of the supervisory layer (the downward pointing control arrow).

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

1. The cycle at the **level of the programme**. Education is executed at the level of the programmes and this is where the results are obtained. Within the **internal annual cycle**, programmes report on the execution and the results, and make plans for improvement. The Board of the Faculty approves the plans and supervises their execution. Within the **external six-yearly cycle**, programmes are re-accredited after an external assessment procedure once every six years based on a decision of the NVAO. As of 2014, it is standard procedure for an internal midterm review to be conducted halfway this external cycle to determine the state of affairs since the previous assessment and to assess the quality of the graduation assignments.
2. The cycle at the level of the Faculty and Services. The attention for education of the Boards of the Faculties and of the Directors of Services is aimed primarily at creating the preconditions for good education. Within the internal annual cycle, Faculties report on the execution of the educational tasks and make plans for improving these tasks. The Executive Board approves the plans and supervises.

As of 2014, an internal assessment of the quality assurance of teaching and learning is conducted once every three years alongside the annual cycle. The rhythm of this internal three-year cycle is such that two internal assessments take place in 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 Services.

3. The cycle at the level of the institution. During the internal annual cycle, the Executive Board directs the Policy on Education at the level of the institution (as laid down in the Quality Manual) on the basis of the Institutional Plan and the accompanying Plan of Execution, it reports on the steering activities and makes plans for improving these activities. The Supervisory Council approves the plans and supervises. During the external six-yearly cycle at the level of the institution the quality assurance of the institution is assessed. The institution as a whole is re-accredited on the basis of a decision of the NVAO after an assessment conducted by an external audit committee.

Below, the cycles at the level of programmes, Faculties, Services, or that of the institution as a whole are elaborated further.

4.1 Quality Assurance at the Level of the Programme

The programmes form the core of education at VU University. Here lecturers, support staff, and students work at shaping education; this is where the education of VU University is made. Insight into results achieved by programmes is obtained using various measuring instruments elaborated below. The instruments and their mutual relationships are represented in a year calendar (See Figure 2).
### Figure 2. Connection between the programme cycle, faculty cycle, and institutional cycle. Cy=calendar year, ay=academic year
4.1.1 Internal annual cycle at the level of the programme

In their programme annual report, each programme reports to the Board of the Faculty on education and the quality education during the previous year. The Programme Director is responsible for this report. In autumn, the Programme Director sends the programme annual report to the Dean. Below, a conscious distinction is made between the Academic Year t-1/t and the Calendar Year t. Programme annual reports and programme year plans cover academic years (September to September). Faculty annual reports and year plans cover calendar years (the Faculty education annual report covers an academic year). The programme report in Year t deals with Academic Year t-1/t. The programme annual report contains a programme year plan which describes the resolutions for the Academic Year t+1/t+2. In autumn, the resolutions are coordinated with the Board of the Faculty and included in the Faculty year plan for Calendar Year t+1, (see below under 4.2 Quality Assurance at the Level of Faculties and Services, and also see Figure 2). In autumn, the Faculty year plan is coordinated with the Executive Board during the Bestuurlijk Overleg VU [administrative coordination].

» Programme annual report

Annually, in autumn, the Programme Director writes a programme annual report. For this annual report an institution-wide format is available in which different sources are combined. The report deals with topics such as intake, transfer, and outflow of students, excellence, student counselling, lectures, education evaluation, processes surrounding testing and assessment, and facilities. (For the complete table of contents see Appendix 1.)

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

» Annual reports of Examination Committees and Programme Committees

Examination Committees and Programme Committees report on their work annually. An institution-wide format is available; the annual reports are appendices to the programme annual report. Amongst others, the annual report of the Examination Committee deals with the composition and functioning of the committee, guaranteeing the quality of interim examination, the final assignments and examinations, the procedure for appointing examiners, amendments to rules and guidelines, and the assessment of interim examinations and examinations. In addition, an overview is given of the appeals, complaints, and requests the Examination Committee was involved in (for the complete contents see Appendix 1). The annual report of the Programme

3 See Format opleidingsjaarverslag [programme annual report]
4 See Format opleidingsjaarverslag [programme annual report]
Committee deals with the composition and functioning of the committee and the advice given (for the complete table of contents see Appendix 1).

»Teaching Assessments
Teaching assessments are supplied by the Department of OKZ of Student- en Onderwijszaken [student and teaching affairs]. The results of the teaching assessments are connected to continually updated institution-wide and Faculty references. The following instruments are used by the programmes.

**Course Assessments**
Course assessments are conducted through VUnet. In VUnet, lecturers themselves can compile lists of questions on the basis of standardised blocks of questions. Courses with less than 75 students may be assessed on paper, in which case lecturers choose for the best-fitting paper questionnaire on VUnet. In the case of both digital and paper assessments, the results of the course assessments are fed back to the students registered for that course. The lecturer has the possibility to include his or her comments on the outcome of the assessment in the feedback. For the assessments of work placements and bachelor’s and master’s theses, specially designed questionnaires are used.

**Overview of Course Assessments**
The results of all teaching assessments are included in the data warehouse of VU University. On the basis of this information, various management information reports are generated whereby, for instance, insight is provided into the results of programmes, study years, and Faculties.

**Curriculum Assessments**
Apart from the programme assessments, questionnaires are also administered for an entire study year or for entire bachelor’s or master’s programmes. These curriculum assessments provide insight into the opinions of students as to cohesion, structure, the level, counselling and such like during the study year in question or during the entire programme.

»Examination Service
Alongside information on the quality of education, programmes also allow the examinations to be assessed. At the Examination Service of the Department of OKZ, multiple choice examinations are processed automatically. An item analysis (and the interpretation thereof) is always supplied together 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, an examination analysis is also possible for an examination with open questions. Item and examination analyses constitute an important contribution to increasing the quality of examinations. The Examination Service is offered both for paper & pencil examinations as for digital examinations.

»MIVU
The management information that is collected, laid down, and opened up centrally at VU University is also available to programmes. Amongst others, it deals with the topics of educational outcomes, dropout, switching, intake, excellence, exchange students, interim examination results, results on the Nationale Studenten Enquête (NSE) [national student questionnaire], and the results of teaching assessments.

4.1.2 External Fixed Yearly Cycle at the Level of the Programme

» Current Programmes
As part of the six-yearly cycle of programme assessments conducted by NVAO, various quality measurements are made which contribute towards improving the educational quality of the programme. The Critical Reflection, written by the programme itself, offers much insight into the quality of the programme. The Department of OKZ supports Faculties by assessing the Critical Reflections, drafting scenarios for trial audits, and helping to prepare and conduct the midterm reviews and the audit visit. On the basis of the assessment report of the audit panel, the NVAO decides on the accreditation worthiness of the programme. Both the assessment report as well as the NVAO decision follows the standards for a programme assessment:

1. The intended learning outcomes: The intended learning outcomes of the programme are substantiated as far as content, level, and orientation are concerned, and comply with international requirements.
2. The educational learning environment: The programme, the staff, and the facilities specific to the programme enable incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
3. Examinations and intended learning outcomes: The programme disposes of an adequate system of examinations and demonstrates that the intended final qualifications are achieved.
As of 2014, it is standard procedure that halfway the six-year accreditation cycle, a midterm review is conducted for each programme. A committee, consisting of at least external domain expertise and internal process expertise, visits the programme and reports to the Programme Director and the Board of the Faculty. The committee reports on both the improvement possibilities as well as its impression of the extent to which the programme has managed to accommodate the recommendations contained in the assessment report of the previous accreditation.

» New Programmes
For new programmes a declaration of intent, which is submitted by the Faculty concerned to the Bestuurlijk Overleg VU [VU administrative coordination] (Deans and Executive Board) should be approved; the desirability of the new programme within the current programmes offered by VU University is considered. In the case of a publicly funded programme, it is followed by a macro efficiency application to the Minister. Subsequently, a proposal for initial accreditation of the programme, the so-called Toets Nieuwe Opleiding, TNO, is submitted by the Executive Board to NVAO. The Stuurgroep Onderwijskwaliteit, STOK [quality of teaching and learning steering committee] advises the Executive Board about each application for a new bachelor’s or master’s programme which VU University intends to submit to NVAO. The Department of OKZ supports STOK in forming their opinion.

4.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE LEVEL OF THE FACULTIES AND THE SERVICES

4.2.1 Internal Annual Cycle at the Level of the Faculties and Services
During the internal annual cycle, the Boards of Faculties and Programme Directors execute their Policies on Education at the level of the Faculties (teaching) and of the Services (creating the preconditions for good education), they report on the execution, and make plans for improvement of their teaching tasks. The Boards of Faculties and Programme Directors consult with the Executive Board in Administrative Coordinations (BOs) and Portfolio Holders’ Coordinations (POs). An Administrative Coordination (BO) takes place twice a year in spring (May-June) and in autumn (October-November). During these discussions, the entire Executive Board and the entire Board of the Faculty (at a Faculty) or management team (at a Service) meet. In addition, a consultation between the Dean and the Rector, (Portfolio Holders’ Coordinations, POs) takes place twice a year. At least monthly work meetings take place between Directors of Services and the Portfolio Holders of the Executive Board.
The Faculty cycle commences with the **framework document** in May-June in Year t-1. Subsequently, in August-September of Year t-1, the Faculty drafts a **year plan** and **budget**. The plan is adopted in the second Administrative Coordination between the Faculty and the Executive Board in autumn. During Year t, the state of affairs is reported by the Faculty every four months (the four/eight/twelve-month reports). The **eight-month report** is discussed together with the year plan and the budget in the second Administrative Coordination. The **twelve-month report** (annual report) is discussed in spring during the first Administrative Coordination. In the Portfolio Holders’ Coordinations (POs) between the Dean and the Rector, the state of affairs with regards to teaching and learning and research is discussed. Figure 2 illustrates the internal annual cycle. As illustrated, the priorities of all programmes in the Faculties for the Academic Year t/t+1 are included in the year plan.

» Reports

Important components of the Faculty or Service cycle are the year plan and the four-month reports. The year plan and the four-month report contain a chapter dedicated to teaching and learning, which deals with the qualitative and quantitative indicators with reference to the bachelor’s, master’s, and postgraduate programmes. This chapter also contains a section which reports specifically on quality assurance of teaching and learning. In addition, for the Portfolio Holders’ Coordinations (POs), the accreditation portrait per Faculty is an important report. In this report, the state of affairs with reference to programme assessments is rendered.

Alongside the input from the programme annual reports, the input for the four-month reports of the Faculty to the Executive Board derives from the management information supplied by **MIVU**. Supplementary to the aforementioned information for the four-month reports to the Executive Board, use is also made of the results of the national student questionnaire (**NSE**) at the level of the Services, as well as information from student panels.

» Support

At central level, the Services **Financiën & Audit** (F&A) [finances and auditing], **Bureau Bestuurszaken** (BZ) [administrative office], **Student- en Onderwijszaken** (SOZ) [student and teaching affairs], and Human Resource Management, Arbo & Milieu (HRM-AMD) [occupational health & environment] are the supply services involved in preparing the Administrative Coordinations (BOs) and Portfolio Holders’ Coordinations (POs), and for monitoring the agreements. The co-workers of these Services think pro-actively about which topics might be relevant for discussion in an Administrative or a Portfolio Holders’ Coordination. Additionally, F & A coordinates and has final say in the establishment of the agenda and finalising the agreements.
At the level of the Faculties, the Faculty *Onderwijsbureau* [education centre] provides support for preparing and executing the curriculum and in applying the Faculty system of quality assurance of teaching and learning.

### 4.2.2 Internal three-year cycle at the level of the Faculty

Every three years an internal audit is conducted at Faculty level. On behalf of the Executive Board an internal audit committee assesses the Faculty quality assurance of teaching and learning. For the framework to be used for the quality assurance of education, the committee bases itself on the five standards for the institutional audit as formulated by *NVAO* (see level of the institution, Table 3). On the basis of these standards, assessment aspects have been formulated by translating the *NVAO* standards to the level of the Faculty and providing them with an interpretation applied more specifically to VU University.

### 4.3 Quality Assurance At the Level Of The Institution

At the level of the institution, the Institutional Plan is a perennial planning document for the course and strategy of VU University. The guiding principles for VU University are laid down in the Institutional Plan. Below, annual planning at the level of the institution is set out.

#### 4.3.1 Internal Annual Cycle

The institutional cycle also starts with the *framework document* in June of Year t-1. Subsequently, in September to December of Year t-1, the *year plan* and *budget* are drafted and adopted.

In an *annual report* drafted after six months, at the end of the year, the Executive Board reports in full to the *Raad van Toezicht* [Supervisory Council] on the activities contained in the year plan. In the six-month report, the state of affairs as regards content is described at the level of VU University. The annual report is a complete account of the previous year.

*» Reports*

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

The reports are compiled with the help of the Institutional Plan and contain indicators that supervise not only the business operation of VU University but also the substantive progress of
teaching and learning and research. These reports are based on the MIVU management information. Quarterly, the accreditation portrait is delivered by Student- en Onderwijszaken (SOZ) [student and teaching affairs] to the Executive Board.

» Consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Council
The Supervisory Council is informed about education as part of the regular planning & control cycle. The Supervisory Council discusses the six-month report in autumn and approves the year plan and budget for the coming year. In spring, the annual report of the previous year is submitted to the Supervisory Council for approval. The developments and results in the field of teaching and learning form part of it. Furthermore, specifically important – institution-wide – developments concerning education are placed on the agenda separately in the consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Council, such as the performance agreements, the outcomes of the Nationale Studenten Enquête [national student questionnaire] and the accreditation portrait.

» Services
The Services Financiën & Audit (F&A) [finances and auditing], Bureau Bestuurszaken (BZ) [administrative office], Student- en Onderwijszaken (SOZ) [student and teaching affairs], and Human Resource Management, Arbo & Milieu (HRM-AMD) [occupational health & environment] are the supply services involved in preparing the reports and consultations between the Executive Board and the Supervisory Council and for monitoring the agreements. The co-workers of these Services think pro-actively about topics which might be relevant for discussion in a report or during a consultation. Additionally, BZ coordinates and has the final say in the establishment of the agenda and finalising the agreements.

4.3.2 External Six-yearly Cycle at the Level of the Institution
Once every six years, each institution of higher education in the Netherlands is subjected to an institutional audit. The assessment framework of the NVAO\(^5\) states: “The purpose of the institutional audit is to determine whether the management of the institution, based on its view on the quality of education, uses an efficient system of quality assurance enabling it to guarantee the quality of the programmes on offer. It is emphasised that the purpose of an institutional audit is not to assess the quality of the separate programmes.” To this end NVAO has developed an

assessment framework based on five standards that are elaborated in Table 2. These five standards, therefore, also serve as a basis for the assessment framework for the internal three-yearly cycle at Faculty level.

Table 2. The NVAO Assessment Framework for Institutional Audits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Assessment Framework for Institutional Audits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. View on quality of teaching and learning</td>
<td>The institution disposes of a widely supported view on the quality of its education and on developing a quality culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Policy</td>
<td>The institution disposes of adequate policy to realise its view on the quality of education. In any case it comprises: policy regarding teaching and learning, staff, facilities, accessibility and practicability for students with a functional limitation, embedding research in education, as well as the interwovenness of teaching and learning and the professional and occupational fields, both nationally and internationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Insight into Results</td>
<td>The institution has insight into the extent to which its view on the quality of education is realised and regularly measures and assesses the quality of its programmes through students, co-workers, alumni, and representatives of the professional field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Improvements</td>
<td>The institution can demonstrate that where necessary it improves its programmes systematically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organisational and Decision Structure</td>
<td>The institution has an effective organisational and decision-making structure as regards the quality of its programmes, in which tasks, responsibilities, and accountabilities are clearly designated and it includes participation of students and co-workers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Judgement

Based on its view on the quality of education, the management of the institution uses an effective system of quality assurance by means of which it is able to guarantee the quality of the programmes on offer.

“The audit committee provides a balanced and motivated opinion on each of these five standards on a three-point scale: meets the standard, does not meet the standard, or meets the standard partially. Subsequently, the audit commission provides a motivated final opinion on the question 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”. (NVAO, 2010, p. 6).
5. QUALITY REQUIREMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 GENERAL

Requirements

2. Quality Assurance at VU University is characterised by an integrated approach.
3. It is the responsibility of the managers and directors to see to a fitting climate within which individual professionals and students feel appreciated and are inspired to deliver high quality.

Recommendations

1. Training the members of Examination Committees and regular consultations between Examination Committees.
2. Training Programme Committees, both lecturers and students.
3. Training quality assurance co-workers and other individuals or bodies in the system.
4. Communication on how the system of quality assurance operates at the levels of the programmes, the Faculties and Services, and the institution.
5. Assessing the planning & control cycle at the levels of the programmes, the Faculties and Services, and the institution.

5.2 PROGRAMMES

Requirements

1. Before November 1, the Programme Director drafts a programme annual report on the previous academic year. This report is written in parallel with the annual report of the Programme Committee and the annual report of the Examination Committee and, therefore, adequate exchange of information between the different parties is indispensable. A format for these three reports is available and by following this format closely all the important topics will be included. It speaks for itself that Programme Committees, Examination Committees, and Programme Directors are free to add additional points as they see fit.
2. The annual reports of the Examination Committee and the Programme Committee are appendices to the programme annual report.
3. The programme annual report, including the annual reports of the Programme Committee and the Examination Committee, also contain the year plan for the coming academic year. In consultation with the Board of the Faculty, the programme has until February 1 to refine the year plan.

4. Every six years an external programme assessment is conducted. Programmes see to it that the necessary documents concerning the programme accreditations are ready on time and organise the assessment procedure.

5. Half way the external programme assessment, a midterm review takes place.

6. The Programme Directors are responsible for organising the teaching assessments. Assessments should be conducted as stipulated in the assessment plan and feedback must be given to lecturers and students.

7. Programme Directors are responsible for organising the curriculum assessments.

8. The Programme Director sees to it that the quantitative information supplied by the examination service and MIVU is discussed in the proper place.

5.3 PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Requirements

1. Before November 1, the Programme Committee drafts an annual report on the previous academic year. This annual report is an appendix to the programme annual report.

2. Amongst others, this annual report deals with the tasks of the Programme Committee, namely:
   a. Advising on the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER);
   b. Assessing the execution of the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER);
   c. Discussing the results and measures of improvement arising from the teaching and curriculum assessments.

5.4 EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

Requirements

1. Before November 1, the Examination Committee drafts an annual report on the previous academic year. This annual report is an appendix to the programme annual report.

2. Amongst others, this annual report deals with the tasks of the Examination Committee, namely:
   a. Guaranteeing the quality of interim examinations, theses, and examinations;
   b. Appointing examiners;
c. Amending rules and guidelines;
d. Assessing interim examinations and examinations;
e. Providing a summary of appeals and complaints that were dealt with by the Examination Committee.

5.5 FACULTIES

Requirements

1. The programme annual report is discussed by the management team of the Faculty. The programme annual reports and the discussion of these reports constitute the input for the Faculty year plan and the Faculty education annual report.

2. Before October 1, the Dean drafts a Faculty year plan for the coming calendar year. The Faculty year plan is discussed in the autumn Administrative Coordination (BO) in November. The execution of the adopted year plan is subsequently checked according to the four/eight/twelve-month reports that are drafted and discusses during the subsequent calendar year.

3. Before January 1, the Dean drafts the Faculty annual report on teaching and learning during the previous academic year. A format is available for this annual report, which requires a combination of the programme annual reports.

4. Parts of this Faculty report on teaching and learning can subsequently be included in the Faculty annual report (twelve-month report) that deals with the previous calendar year and which covers more than teaching and learning alone. This annual report should be supplied on March 1 and is discussed in the spring Administrative Coordination (BO).

5. In between two external institutional audits, internal audits are conducted in order to determine the state of affairs in the Faculty. Faculties participate in these interim audits and supply the required documents.

6. Participating in the administrative consultative structure.

Recommendation

Drafting, adopting, and distributing the Faculty quality assurance policy. The Quality Manual serves as a guideline.
5.6 SERVICES

Requirements

1. Before October 1, the Service Director drafts a year plan for the coming calendar year. The year plan is discussed during the autumn Administrative Coordination (BO) in November. The execution of the incoming year plan is subsequently checked according to the four/eight/twelve-month reports which are drafted and discussed in the subsequent calendar year.

2. Before March 1, the Service Director drafts an annual report (twelve-month report) on the previous calendar year. This annual report is discussed in the spring Administrative Coordination (BO).

3. In between two external institutional audits, internal audits are conducted in order to determine the state of affairs in the Service. Services participate in these interim audits and supply the required documents.

4. Participating in the administrative consultative structure.

5.7 INSTITUTION

Requirements

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

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

3. Every six years an external institutional audit is conducted. The Executive Board is responsible for the fact that the required documents concerning the institutional audit are ready on time and it organises the assessment procedure.

4. Participating in the administrative consultative structure.