



Interstedelijk
Studenten
Overleg



Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en
Wetenschap



Vereniging
Hogescholen



VSNU
vereniging van universiteiten
association of universities
THE NETHERLANDS

Investing in the quality of education ***Quality agreements 2019-2024***

Amsterdam

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In this document, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), the publicly funded universities of applied sciences represented in the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the publicly funded research universities, represented in this matter by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Dutch Student Union (LSVb), and the Dutch National Students' Association (ISO), have set down their agreements regarding the form that quality agreements on higher education are to take.

This text also forms, in its entirety, part of the *Sectorakkoord hbo-2018* (universities of applied sciences sector agreement 2018) and the *Sectorakkoord wo-2018* (research universities sector agreement 2018), which provide a relevant context for the agreements referred to below.

The undersigned agree to the following:

Investing revenues from the student loan system through quality agreements

The quality agreements relate to all publicly funded universities of applied sciences (HBO) and research universities (WO) and run from 2019 to 2024.

The coalition agreement states that the revenues from the student loan system shall be linked to 'quality agreements at institutional level'. There is broad agreement for implementing these agreements in close dialogue with the education community and, where relevant, with the involvement of relevant partners. Students, universities of applied sciences, research universities, and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science are addressing this matter and have made agreements on the quality agreements.

The aim is to use the revenues from the student loan system to make visible improvements in education. In this respect, we have a promise to keep to students. Universities of applied sciences and research universities have already given a boost to higher education through previous investments, and with the deployment of the revenues from the student loan system, they seek to further this process.

In substantive terms, we are adhering to the course set down in the Strategic Agenda of 2015 and the Joint Agenda of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, VSNU, ISO, and LSVb, with a greater focus on the personal and social education of students, a stronger emphasis on progress through the educational chain, and a firmer embedding of higher education in society.

In view of the aforementioned, education institutes are formulating proposals and aims for improvements in the following areas: more intensive and small-scale teaching; educational differentiation, including the development of talent both as part of and away from studies; an improvement to the professional qualities of teachers; appropriate and good-quality educational facilities; more and better supervision of students; study success, including progression to other courses, access, and equality of opportunity. This document sets out in greater detail how we define these areas, or themes.

Implementation by individual institutes

The education institutes will individually translate the common themes for which the resources are to be used into concrete measures and policies. This will take place in a dialogue between students, teachers, external relevant stakeholders (businesses, social organisations, other educational establishments, regional governments), managers, consultation bodies, and regulators. Each institute will produce a plan to show what it is seeking to achieve with the revenues from the student loan system until the year 2024. These plans on how the revenues from the student loan system are to be used will contain expenditure proposals (hereinafter referred to as 'proposals') in relation to the six nationally agreed themes and the aims that each institute seeks to achieve through this expenditure. Proposals and aims may apply to the entire institute, but also to certain parts of it or to specific groups of students. For each of the six themes, the institutes will describe either the proposals and the related aims they seek to achieve in respect of each theme using the revenues from the student loan system, or why they have decided not to allocate any of the revenues to a particular theme. The institutes will describe in explicit terms their justification for their choices in relation to their broader educational proposals, vision, history, and context; this can include their long-term budgetary developments.

They will also set out in their plans how far they would like to have come in achieving their proposals by the year 2021.

Each institute's plan on how to use the revenues from the student loan system can be incorporated into a new institutional plan, but it could also be appended to an existing one, for example.

Parties agree that the education institutes will give their participation bodies the right to give their consent to their plans regarding the use of revenues from the student loan system. The institutes will also give their participation bodies the right to give their consent to that part of the annual budget concerning revenues from the student loan system, based on the consideration that said revenues are among the main parts of each institute's budget. This concerns more concrete details of the long-term budget contained in the plan. Management and the participation bodies will also agree on the process to be followed in order to arrive at the plan on how to use revenues from the student loan system. The participation bodies will be involved at an appropriately early stage and thereby have the opportunity to contribute ideas. Management and the participation bodies will jointly ensure the broad-based involvement of the community of the university of applied sciences/research university and will agree on which bodies in their respective institutes will be involved in the creation of their plan.

The long-term budget that each institute includes in its plan will provide information on the areas to which the institutes propose to spend the revenues from the student loan system. This will provide a means for being accountable to students, parliament, and society at large with regard to how the revenues are to be spent and therefore how the aims are to be achieved.

It is possible that some institutes will have already made investments prior to the making available of the revenues from the student loan system that they would not have made had these revenues not become available. If they wish, the institutes concerned can make this known in their plans, and they may decide to use the revenues from the student loan system to further the investments they had made for 2015-2017.

In the institutes' annual plans from the year 2019, they will account in a separate chapter for the progress they have made in terms of content and process. They will also contain the agreements with their participation bodies on how the revenues from the student loan system are to be spent. The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the VSNU, and student organisations have previously agreed that each main participation body will be given the opportunity to report independently on how the revenues from the student loan system are to be spent. This will appear in an appendix to the annual report. A report on how the right to give consent works appears in the consultation monitor, which appears every two years.

Each university of applied sciences/research university will ensure that the participation bodies are properly equipped to be able to hold discussions with them. Each university of applied sciences/research university will support their participation bodies and facilitate the execution of their duties, such as the provision of a toolkit for assessing the main point of budgets and of sufficient time. The ministry will assist the ISO, LSVb, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, and the VSNU in the setting up of a national point of contact for specific questions raised by participation bodies. The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, VSNU, and the ISO and LSVb student organisations have noted that proper participation on the part of participation bodies in the matter of quality agreements and in a broader sense is important for universities of applied sciences/research universities. They have therefore reached agreements on making enough time available for the student members on the main participation bodies. Larger universities of applied sciences/research universities will make at least eight hours a week available for the student members of their main participation bodies, and those with under ten thousand students, at least four hours a week. A 'comply or explain' principle exists in relation to these minimum levels.

Parties agree that the plans for using revenues from the student loan system will be put to their supervisory boards after the participation bodies have given their consent to them.

Independent assessing

The plans and their realisation will be assessed independently. This will be in line with the process of the voluntary institutional audit (ITK), which is carried out by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). It is expected that most institutes will use the ITK cycle. This means there will be few additional burdens associated with the assessment of the quality agreements, and the task will lie with the existing higher-education regulatory authority. A separate quality-agreements trail will be added to the ITK process, which is based on an assessment by a panel and a visit by the panel to the institute concerned. This will result in independent recommendations being made to the minister regarding the relevant institute's plan for using the revenues from the student loan system. These recommendations will therefore be separate to the NVAO decision on the ITK.

For institutes that do not take part in an ITK, a separate process will be set up, which will also be based on an assessment by a panel that visits the institutes in question. Regarding the institutes for which a separate ITK has already been completed, a 'third trail light' will be set up, using the panel (or part of it) that was involved with the ITK.

There are three assessment moments: an assessment of the initial plans, an assessment in the autumn of 2022, and a post-period evaluation. The opinions of the NVAO at each of these moments will lead to recommendations for each institute to the minister. An assessment framework will be determined for the assessments, in line with the agreements contained in this document. A description of what is being assessed will be given for each assessment moment.

Assessing the plans

The following criteria will be used to assess each institute's plan.

- The plan makes a reasoned contribution to improving educational quality. The institute's proposals for the revenues from the student loan system and the aims it seeks to realise with them in relation to the six themes are clearly formulated and are in keeping with the institute's context, history, and broad vision.
- The internal stakeholders have been sufficiently involved with the drawing up of the plan and there is sufficient support among internal and external stakeholders.
- The proposals in the plan are realistic in the light of the proposed use of the instruments and resources, and of the institute's organisation and processes.

Assessment in 2022

In 2022, there will be an assessment of what the plan has achieved up to the year 2021. The criteria for this assessment will be:

- The institute has made sufficient progress in realizing its proposals, bearing in mind the efforts that have been made and how it has dealt with unforeseen circumstances.
- The participation bodies and other relevant stakeholders have been sufficiently involved during the implementation of the plan.

In order to assess this, the institute will itself take stock of the situation in its 2021 annual report. To this will be added a reflection by the participation bodies on what the plan has achieved at that point, as will the involvement of stakeholders and the degree to which the participation bodies have been able to play their part. The 2021 annual report and the reflection by the participation bodies will form the basis for the assessment by the NVAO. The NVAO will hold additional discussions with the institute if it is necessary on the basis of these documents, and the panel involved in the assessment of the plan may be asked to visit the institute again.

Evaluation

The evaluation of what has been achieved by the plan at the end forms part of the ITK process, in the case of institutes that take part in it. This concerns the next ITK cycle. The achievements of the plans of institutes that do not take part in the ITK are evaluated six years after their original assessment. This means that the evaluations of all the institutes do not take place at the same time. Some institutes will have a new ITK in 2023, and others not until early 2026.

As well as the evaluation of this series of quality agreements, the assessment of any subsequent plans may be included in the ITK cycle that starts in 2023. It will be up to a future government to decide whether a system of quality agreements should be continued. The decisions on this will be made before the start of the new ITK cycle.

The evaluation is, like the assessment of the plans prior to the use of the revenues from the student loan system, an assessment that involves a panel and a visit to the institute in question. The evaluation will involve the use of existing documents - annual reports by the relevant institute (the most recent in particular) and, as with the 2022 assessment, the reflection by the participation bodies.

As with the 2022 assessment, the criteria for the evaluation are:

- Up to 2024, the institute has sufficiently realised its proposals, bearing in mind the efforts that have been made and how it has dealt with unforeseen circumstances.
- The participation bodies and other relevant stakeholders have been sufficiently involved during the implementation of the plan.

Funding

The legal basis on which the minister allocates the revenues from the student loan system in the form of additional funding - the so-called quality funding - is set down in an Order in Council, based on Article 2.6 of the *Higher Education and Research Act (WHW)*. This Order in Council contains,

inter alia, the substantive themes on which the institutes should formulate their proposals and goals, as well as the period for which the quality funding is to be awarded.

In the case of universities of applied sciences, the revenues from the student loan system will be distributed in proportion to the share of student-related funding for each institute and the education supplement in percentages in a year. In the case of research universities, the revenues from the student loan system will be distributed in proportion to the share of student-related funding for each institute in a year. The table below shows the revenues from the student loan system that will be available for universities of applied sciences and research universities between 2019 and 2024.

x €1 million*	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
90% revenues from the student loan system	184	217	368	460	485	550
<i>Of which, universities of applied sciences</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>228</i>	<i>285</i>	<i>301</i>	<i>341</i>
<i>Accumulation to 2023 - 2024 for possible financial consequences for universities of applied sciences</i>						40
<i>Of which, research universities</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>175</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Accumulation to 2023 - 2024 for possible financial consequences for research universities</i>						25

*All the figures in the table have been rounded up or down, which accounts for any mathematical discrepancies between the figures

In the light of these quality agreements, which the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences endorses on behalf of every university of applied sciences, and the VSNU on behalf of all research universities, the revenues from the student loan system for 2019 and 2020 will be paid out unconditionally in the lump sum (in the case of universities of applied sciences, in proportion to the share of student-related funding for each institute and the education supplement in percentages in a year, and in the case of the research universities, in proportion to the share of student-related funding for each institute).

In the period up to April 2020, the institutes' plans will be assessed by the NVAO. In the event of a positive recommendation by the NVAO and a positive decision by the minister, the institute in question will receive its revenues from the student loan system in the form of quality funding for the period between 2021 and 2024.

The minister will hold discussions with institutes that initially receive a negative assessment about their plans from the NVAO. If the minister then adopts the recommendations by the NVAO, the institutes in question will then have the opportunity to submit new plans that do meet the criteria within twelve months. If the minister still has a negative opinion after the submission of the revised plan (based on the recommendations of the NVAO), the starting point is that the revenues from the student loan system will not be paid out to the institute concerned for the period between 2021 and 2024. The resources will then be reallocated to the other universities of applied sciences/research universities on a pro rata basis.

If the 2022 assessment reveals that insufficient progress has been made in fulfilling the plan, the minister will hold discussions with the institute involved - said institute will then have twelve months to show that it is indeed making enough progress. The NVAO will carry out an assessment in the autumn of 2023, based on a reflection by the institute itself and its participation bodies, to see whether sufficient progress has been made. If progress has not been adequate up to this point, the additional (to 2023) revenues from the student loan system that would have become available for 2024 (the 'accumulation') will be cut. This amount will be made available in 2024 through the Comenius Programme to teachers of the institute in question who have submitted proposals in the field of educational innovation and improvement, unless the minister has well-founded reasons not to opt for this system in the case of individual institutes. This way, the revenues will be allocated to the quality of education of said institute in any case.

Because the *Nationaal Regieorgaan Onderwijsonderzoek* (Netherlands Initiative for Education Research) will assess the quality aspects of Comenius proposals by teachers, it is possible that the revenues for the relevant institute will not be exhausted. In this case, the excess revenues will flow back to the lump sum and be distributed across every university of applied sciences/research university.

There are no costs associated with the evaluation of the fulfilment of the plan for using revenues from the student loan system. The institutes can use the results of the evaluation for determining their own strategies and, if a future government decides that quality agreements should be made, when drawing up their plans for the next period. The minister will also hold discussions with those institutes that are judged insufficient by the NVAO.

Following national developments

The quality agreements give institutes the scope to make their own choices regarding improvements to educational quality. The progress of the quality agreements is monitored at institute level, as described above. At the same time, parties wish to see what quality agreements mean from a national perspective for improving the quality of education. For that reason, the NVAO will create an independent national picture from the year 2020 of the current state of play regarding quality agreements. The picture will be based on the plans and on the initial period of their implementation. An interim assessment in 2022 will also serve as a the basis for a national picture to be drawn up by the NVAO. No additional information will be required from the institutes for these national pictures.

Landelijke Studentenvakbond (Dutch Student Union, LSVb), based in Utrecht, acting as a representative of students, represented by:

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Thom de Graaf

Vereniging van Universiteiten (Association of Universities in the Netherlands, VSNU) based in The Hague, acting in this matter as the representative of the universities, as meant in subsections a, b, h, and i of the appendix to the Higher Education and Research Act, represented by:

Pieter Duisenberg

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science, acting as the administrative authority and as the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands:

Ingrid van Engelshoven

Appendix 1: Effects of quality agreement themes

More intensive and small-scale education

The relationship between teachers and students is crucial for effective education. That is why further intensification of the contact between students and teachers is important. This can be achieved, for example, by committing to smaller teaching groups and the formation of communities, and by making more time available for personal feedback and individual supervision. To achieve this, the student-teacher ratio needs to be reduced. Appointing more teachers also makes it possible to link the teaching content to societal themes and research, increasing curiosity among students and enhancing their research skills.

More and better supervision of students

It is the responsibility of universities of applied sciences/research universities to offer the same opportunities to all their students, regardless of background, origin, or prior education. This should not only be on an incidental basis, when things look likely to go wrong, but also proactively and structurally. One way of attaining this is through intensive supervision by and support from professionally trained tutors, for example, study advisors, psychologists, deans, and study-career supervisors. Better supervision prevents problems and ensures the best-possible development of every student.

Student success rates

Every student with the right abilities should have the chance to start and complete their studies successfully. A focus on progressing from one study level to the next and accessibility to education for secondary education (VO) and secondary vocational education (MBO) students, equal opportunities, including higher education, preventing students from dropping out, and promoting student success rates remain important themes in higher education. Based on analyses of student success rates from among its students, an institute may decide to target its attention at certain groups of students and/or degree programmes, and formulate objectives accordingly.

Educational differentiation

Universities of applied sciences/research universities respond to the different backgrounds and ambitions of students and the needs of the labour market. They do so by offering a varied range of educational programmes at different levels (AD, BA, MA). Investments are also being made in talent programmes, such as 'honours' programmes or those in the field of social involvement, for example, or business, art, or sport.

Universities of applied sciences/research universities can also differentiate themselves in terms of teaching concepts.

Appropriate and good-quality educational facilities

It is important that study facilities and infrastructure promote intensive and small-scale education. Digital sources could be integrated into the education process even more effectively; students should be able to make optimum use of their educational environments, physical and digital alike, during the course of their studies. Study facilities and infrastructure should be relevant to the needs of education of the future.

Improving the professional qualities of teachers

Good and involved teachers are the key to high-quality education. Efforts could be made at improving the professional qualities of teachers. This should also include greater appreciation of the work of teachers, by placing greater emphasis on teaching performance at university level, for example. Teachers should also be kept up-to-date with the most recent developments from a substantive, didactic, and digital perspective. It would help here if they were able to share their own course material and to use that of others. Teachers should have more opportunities to work on their own development, by carrying out research, for example (in the case of university of applied sciences teachers).