

*Institutional accreditation abroad. A review of the introduction of institutional accreditation of higher education in Flanders, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Estonia and Scotland. Report commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Anja van der Broek, Wouter van Casteren, Carlijn Braam, Tessa Termorshuizen, Josien Lodewick, Hannah de Vries, Sara Wiertsema, Very Vlaar. ResearchNed, June 2019.*¹

Summary and conclusions

Introduction

European cooperation in higher education as part of the Bologna process has led to increasing transparency and confidence in quality assurance. The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) of 2005 have been integrated into national policy in nearly all countries, although the initiatives at European level have not all been embedded at national level as yet. As a result of the Bologna agreements, the accreditation system for study programmes in higher education was introduced in the Netherlands in 2002, with peer review at its core. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders [*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie*] (NVAO) was made responsible for assessing the quality of higher education study programmes. In 2011, there was a revision of the accreditation system, which included the introduction of the institutional audit [*instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg*] (ITK).

This has led to a stronger quality culture, with as its main area of concern the administrative burden, which is felt to be high. In Europe, there has been a shift in recent years from accreditation at programme level to institute level. External quality assurance activities at institute level have increased by 18 per cent (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), 2019).

On 1 February 2019, the Customised Accreditation Act [*Wet accreditatie op maat*] came into force. The aim of the Act is for higher education institutes to have more confidence and to experience less of an administrative burden during the accreditation procedure. In spring 2018, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) concluded sector agreements with the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [*Vereniging Hogescholen*] to explore how a better balance can be struck between safeguarding the quality of study

¹ For full report (in Dutch), please visit:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/06/30/instellingsaccreditatie-in-het-buitenland>

programmes on the one hand and administrative burdens (actual or felt by staff) on the other. It was also discussed whether institutional accreditation could be a means to this end, with educational institutes having the possibility of choosing between accreditation at institute or programme level.

This international comparative study of institutional accreditation in higher education is part of this exploration. In consultation with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the study was carried out in six European countries: Flanders, Denmark, Norway, Scotland, Latvia and Estonia. These countries were initially studied with the help of an inventory of websites and sources. The literature review was focused at all times on gathering as much information as possible, until the information obtained provided no added value or it was complete. From that time on, existing gaps were filled by means of interviews, including online interviews, or contacts in the countries were asked to respond in writing to questions. A response was received from one or more individuals in each country. These were employees of accreditation organizations, institutes (or umbrella organizations), students and student organizations.

This study requires a few comments. Considerable time was spent in the study collecting information and approaching contacts at accreditation bodies, student organizations, umbrella organizations and ministries in all the countries studied. This produced a rich picture. However, the study also has limitations. Despite repeated efforts to speak to contacts from a variety of forums, the response was at times limited or very slow. As a result, the country descriptions do not always shed light on all the different perspectives. Specifically, there is incomplete information for Norway and Scotland. In addition, all conclusions have to be considered in the context of the implementation stage of the individual country. Finally, the term 'institutional accreditation' has been used for all countries, but this term is not used in the same way in all the countries described. The similarity between the situations described is that they involve systems that enable institutes to assess/accredit their own study programmes.

This summary contains a general description of the results and also serves as an overview of the key conclusions for each country that can be read independently. On the following page, we begin with a timeline featuring essential developments for each country. We then give the key conclusions for each country, based on the main questions. Finally, we look at the implications of these findings for policy relating to institutional accreditation in the Netherlands.

The main research question was formulated as follows:

What has the introduction of institutional accreditation in other countries meant for the balance between the quality assurance of study programmes on the one

hand and the experience of greater confidence and a reduction in the administrative burden felt by higher education institutes on the other?

Three subsidiary questions were formulated for each country:

1. What are the key characteristics of the higher education system in general and the accreditation system in particular?
2. What were the most important reasons for introducing institutional accreditation?
3. What are the results and the impact of institutional accreditation?

Key characteristics of the accreditation system in the countries studied

The quality of study programmes forms the core of the Flemish quality assurance system. After a first round of institute reviews, an integrated system of external quality assurance will be in place from September 2019, with the focus shifting from recognition to quality improvement. There will be accountability either through an institute review or through assessment at programme level by an external evaluation body. A university or university of applied sciences is itself responsible for safeguarding the quality of a study programme if that programme has obtained a positive accreditation decision after an assessment of a new programme and both the first programme accreditation and the institute have achieved a positive or conditional institute review decision. If the institute fails the institute review, there will be a programme accreditation by the NVAO once every six years.

In Denmark, there has been institutional accreditation since 2013. There are no programme accreditations for institutes with positive institutional accreditations. In the case of a conditional institutional accreditation, there will be programme accreditation of new study programmes. For institutes with a negative accreditation outcome, there will be programme accreditation for all existing study programmes and these institutes will not be permitted to start up any new programmes. Both programme accreditation and institutional accreditation take place every six years. In both cases, an independent authority within the government (the AKKR) produces reports for the Accreditation Council, which ultimately makes the decisions. Institutional accreditation focuses on institutional frameworks for quality assurance and safeguarding the knowledge base, the academic level, content, and the relevance of programmes. A student is always present on the panels and teachers, students and external stakeholders are heard during the process. In Denmark, the Ministry carries out a preliminary qualification for all new study programmes, focusing specifically on macro-efficiency.

In Norway, institutional accreditation is carried out once in principle (unless an institute wishes to change its institutional status). Higher education institutes are legally obliged

to implement an internal quality assurance system. Norway's accreditation body NOKUT organizes six to eight-yearly audits by expert panels of the internal quality systems of institutes of higher education, in order to check their internal quality assurance. If concerns arise regarding the quality of institutes, study programmes can be accredited or reaccredited. All institutes of higher education have to be accredited in order for them to be allowed to teach. Accredited universities may develop new study programmes themselves. Accredited specialized institutes and university colleges may develop study programmes within their accredited fields. Outside these fields, they have to apply to NOKUT for accreditation for each programme. Non-accredited institutes have to apply to NOKUT for the accreditation of every new study programme. Teachers, students and external stakeholders are heard during the process.

In Scotland, the quality assurance body QAA assesses the standards and quality of institutes of higher education and makes recommendations in relation to these aspects. Quality assurance and the achievement of academic standards can be judged to be effective, partially effective or ineffective. The Scottish quality enhancement framework (QEF) is based on the Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), which can lead to institutional accreditation. The ELIR assesses the extent to which institutes meet academic standards and how quality and effectiveness within institutes can be improved. The counterpart to the institutional review is quality control through self-evaluation by the institute. This Institution-led Review (ILR) has to be carried out at least every six years. Permission from the Scottish government is needed for a new study programme. Student involvement is a central theme of the Scottish accreditation system: students are involved in every part of the QEF and they are supported by the SPARQS agency, which was set up specially for them. Compared with the involvement of students, that of teachers and external stakeholders is less firmly established and supported. All information about institutional accreditation is public, which is intended to increase public confidence and compliance with academic standards. The focus is on quality improvement.

In Estonia, institutes with a teaching licence from the Ministry (which grants the right to teach at a particular level within a particular study programme) are assessed by the Estonian accreditation organization EKKA through institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups. Institutional accreditation takes place every seven years, assessing the performance of the institute as a whole and the connection between the institute and society. Institutional accreditation is granted for a period of seven years (in the case of a positive decision) or three years (in the case of a conditional decision), or it is not granted. Study programme groups are assessed every seven years (in the case of a positive decision) or four years (in the case of a conditional

decision). This assessment provides recommendations for improving the quality of the programmes and does not impose any sanctions. An application must be made to the Ministry in order to start new study programme groups. An institute is permitted to start new study programmes within a study programme group if it has obtained a positive institutional accreditation result (for seven years). During 2019, the quality assessment of study programme groups will be replaced by a random assessment of sample study programmes. Teachers, students and external stakeholders are formally involved in the accreditation process: they are on the assessment committees and are questioned during the inspection, among other things. Teachers also play an active role in institutes' quality assurance systems.

In Latvia, the system since 1994 has been that institutes are accredited once, for an indefinite period. Only accredited institutes are allowed to award degrees that are recognized by the state. Institutes of higher education are assessed by the AIKA, in accordance with the ESG, and assessment promotes the quality, public profile and international recognition of higher education. In addition to institutional accreditation, which is only carried out at newly established institutes or in the case of an extraordinary accreditation initiated by the Minister of Education and Science, in Latvia there has been accreditation of specializations and licensing of study programmes since 2012. These last two mechanisms are the most important for safeguarding quality. The accreditation of a specific specializations is valid for six years (in the case of a positive decision) or two years (if there is a conditional decision). In other cases, the decision is negative. The assessment includes elements at specialization level and at the level of individual study programmes. The quality of new programmes is assessed through the licensing of programmes. Stakeholders are considering switching to cyclical institutional accreditation, so that the quality of institutes of higher education is systematically checked and institutes are themselves responsible for the content of their programmes. Students, teachers and external stakeholders are involved in the accreditation process through the process of self-assessment, the interviews with various internal stakeholders during the inspection visit by the assessment committee, and representation on the expert panels.

Main reasons for institutional accreditation

The institute reviews were introduced in Flanders because there was a need for institutes of higher education to have greater ownership and more autonomy. The added value of the existing system was also no longer in proportion to the efforts required. Moreover, there was too much emphasis on processes and procedures, rather than on the final level and results achieved. Reducing the administrative burden has never been a priority in Flanders, but it has played a part in the development of institute reviews.

The motive for changing the system in Denmark was to increase confidence in institutes of higher education as regards the quality of their education, together with the wish to place responsibility with the institutes and the implementation of the ESG. The transition from programme accreditation to institutional accreditation was driven in part by the desire to reduce the administrative burden on institutes of higher education.

Prior to introducing the current system in Norway, stakeholders were looking for a body that could put quality issues on the agenda and they were also seeking to give institutes of higher education greater responsibility for the quality of their education programmes. They also wanted to abolish the distinction between public and private institutes. The changes give institutes of higher education more responsibility for their own internal quality assurance system. The administrative burden appears to have played no role, or only a minor one, in the introduction of institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation represents a major administrative burden for small institutes and for this reason they may choose to have every new programme accredited. This is proportionately less work for the institutes in question, as they do not create new study programmes very often.

There were a number of issues involved in Scotland: it wanted its own system for quality policy, separate from that of the rest of the United Kingdom, so that it could focus specifically on the Scottish context. The institutes of higher education were keen to have control of their quality system. There was also a wish to focus on quality improvement, combining reviews with development and improvement activities. The institutes wanted to have an international focus and to involve the student body as an active partner. With the current system, the aim has been mainly for the results to be worth the administrative burden experienced by those involved: if the results have value, the administrative burden is more readily accepted.

Before the introduction of compulsory institutional accreditation in Estonia in 2008, there were a number of challenges to be tackled. Higher education did not meet the requirements of stakeholders, national needs or European quality requirements; the country's political system was changing from a hierarchical structure to one of cooperation with many different actors; the calibre of accreditation committees was too low and could not be compared between committees; the accreditation of each individual study programme was too intensive (both for the accreditation organization and the institutes of higher education); and too little attention was paid to qualitative aspects (the OECD concluded in 2007 that one of the challenges for external assessment was that it was too formal, too focused on quantitative processes and indicators instead of on qualitative analyses). The system of institutional accreditation introduced in 2008 also

had shortcomings, so that the system is now being adjusted again. In 2008, a heavy administrative burden was not the main reason for switching to institutional accreditation, but the current changes (to be made in 2019-2020) will be made partly to lighten the burden. The combination of institutional accreditation, accreditation of study programme groups and other assessments places a heavy administrative burden on institutes, with the addition of a lot of duplication.

The emergence of institutional accreditation in Latvia is connected with four major reforms of the higher education system: the switch to a structure based on Bachelor's and Master's degrees; the emergence of a private sector for higher education; the increase in the autonomy of public universities; and the reintegration of Latvia into the European cooperative structure. The administrative burden also played a role in the introduction of the current institutional accreditation system. The reforms created a need to monitor the quality of education. Additionally, there was a need to assess the programmes in the private higher education sector. The rising number of private institutes of higher education had led to concerns about the quality of the education there. The Latvian government wanted to determine which private institutes were of sufficient quality and should have the right to award degrees recognized by the state. Finally, the prospect of joining the European Union meant that Latvian degrees needed to be guaranteed, so that they would be recognized and accepted in other European countries.

What are the results and the impact of institutional accreditation?

In Flanders, the new system of institute reviews gives the institutes considerable responsibility and ownership. They gain the confidence to safeguard the quality of education in the study programmes themselves and, based on the initial results, they also appear to be achieving this. Educational institutes' experience of the first round of institute reviews and the 'appreciative approach' employed in them has been positive. They find that the quality culture is stimulated, they have greater autonomy in shaping quality control, and stakeholders have greater ownership. Universities and universities of applied sciences have considerable freedom within the system. The administrative burden does not appear to have been diminished, but institutes experience the administrative work as more worthwhile and therefore less of a burden. The scope given to institutes to achieve objectives at their desired pace provides reassurance. In Flanders, there is strong support for the new system. Institutes actively involve students, teachers and external stakeholders in quality assurance and, according to the institutes and umbrella organizations, these groups are generally positive regarding the outcomes of the system. Key issues to consider are, among others, seeking a better balance between central management and decentralized autonomy within institutes, and the possibility of external benchmarking of study programmes. It is also important for

institutes to take their responsibility for safeguarding the quality of their programmes sufficiently seriously and to inform the public sufficiently about the quality of their programmes. Attention could also be paid to the quality of student participation and providing the necessary support for this participation.

The first round of institutional accreditation in Denmark showed that it makes a positive contribution to professionalization, developing quality assurance procedures and embedding those procedures in management. This has brought confidence, produced high quality in higher education and placed a clear responsibility for quality with the institutes of higher education. At the same time, it is noticeable that institutes are calling for changes and improvements, so that institutional accreditation as a method can become more effective, more relevant and more supportive. The administrative burden, whether actual or felt, has not yet been lightened; institutional accreditation takes institutes a lot of time due to the large amount of documentation required. This is in spite of a revision of the system in which the focus was shifted from defined procedures to functioning practices. Approval of new study programmes also takes a lot of time. A factor in the success of the Danish method of accreditation is the combination of criteria that give a clear frame of reference and the freedom for institutes to shape quality assurance as they see fit. Another strong point is the method followed: a self-evaluation report, a panel of experts and a publicly accessible accreditation report. This method is in line with the common European standards (ESG) and it is transparent. Most institutes indicate, furthermore, that the clear embedding of quality assurance within management has contributed positively to their accreditation process, as well as involving employees in the process. Areas of concern are related among other things to the overlap between the criteria.

In the first round of institutional accreditation, the AKKR strongly emphasized written documentation as a basis for an assessment and concentrated its attention on consistency of procedures and practices. As a result of this focus, the development of quality systems was neglected. The expertise and experience of panel members should also be called on more, so that they can make suggestions for improvement. The AKKR could also contribute more to developing new procedures and involving stakeholders.

The introduction of institutional accreditation in Norway has led to the quality of higher education being better safeguarded. It has also increased confidence in the quality of higher education study programmes and led to similar programmes being assessed against the same Norwegian standards for good education. The administrative burden is low for larger educational institutes. Smaller educational institutes do experience an administrative burden and for this reason they often decide not to introduce institutional accreditation. Various stakeholders have great confidence in NOKUT and confidence in

higher education is bolstered by its work, at least among students. It is sometimes difficult for small institutes to meet all the requirements of accreditation and they frequently opt to have any new programmes accredited individually. According to evaluations, all stakeholders are positive about the work of NOKUT and their cooperation with the body. Feedback received is dealt with constructively. Students feel very involved in NOKUT's work and they are taken seriously. However, it is seen as a drawback that uniform rules apply to all institutes, leaving less scope for differences between institutes or for customization. One risk of this is that higher education could become homogenized and in consequence insufficiently distinctive.

The introduction of the accreditation system in Scotland has not had much effect on the administrative burden experienced by staff. However, confidence in higher education has increased and is also being encouraged further. By setting up a quality system that better fits the Scottish context, those involved have tried to make it possible to appreciate the value of such a system. As a result, costs and efforts are weighed up more accurately against the benefits and the administrative burden can be made to feel less oppressive. Because the accreditation system focuses explicitly on improving the quality of education, it is used indirectly to give new impetus to the stagnating educational innovation process. The primary goal of the accreditation process in Scotland was to create a quality culture, and this goal has been achieved. It is considered positive that the accreditation process focuses on improving quality and that the experiences and involvement of students are important in this process. The accreditation process seems to have increased confidence in higher education. Expectations in relation to the results of the accreditation process have also been fulfilled. The approach and the methodology used are evaluated periodically. Preserving the Scottish identity is seen as one of the key factors in the success of the accreditation process. Areas of concern in the Scottish accreditation system are that the external reviewers are not always seen positively because they do not always have the appropriate knowledge of the Scottish higher education system and/or the quality improvement agenda. In addition, student involvement is time-consuming, in particular the time needed to prepare students properly for full membership of a review team.

In Estonia, there is great confidence in the institutes of higher education and in the way in which various actors safeguard the interests of these institutes and the national interests of Estonia. Quality assessment in the current system meets European quality requirements and also offers pointers for improvement. Teachers, students and external stakeholders are formally involved in the accreditation process and they are generally happy in their roles. The Estonian system is also still developing. This development appears to be progressing to the satisfaction of, and in cooperation with, European

organizations as well as Estonian institutes of higher education, students, external stakeholders and other interested parties.

An issue to be looked at is the recent shift from group assessments of study programmes to random checks of programmes. Both students and institutes are of the opinion that institutes themselves provide and develop sound programmes. At the same time, checks are made on the internal quality assurance system by means of institutional accreditation and, in between times, through the 'performance contracts'. According to the institutes, another development issue concerns focusing more broadly across the sectors on learning from established improvement points.

In Latvia, institutional accreditation has proved to be an efficient mechanism that has boosted the overall quality of higher education, although in its current form it is judged not to be sufficiently effective and to have little impact. It encourages confidence in institutes of higher education, among other things because information on the accreditation status of institutes of higher education is publicly available. Another important factor in the success of institutional accreditation is the involvement of students in the accreditation process. The transition from programme accreditation to accreditation of specializations has provided a broader picture of the quality of institutes of higher education. This makes it easier to anticipate the needs of the labour market. The disadvantage of accreditation of specializations as the main mechanism of quality assurance is that only part of the whole is assessed, whereas an institute is a coherent whole. To date, institutional accreditation has had barely any impact on the administrative burden, as for most institutes it is a one-off process. Another area of concern is that the administrative burden is expected to be high in 2019, due to the large number of reaccreditation procedures for specializations. There are currently discussions on introducing cyclical institutional accreditation to guarantee quality in a more systematic and comprehensive manner. Reasons for this are that it might reduce the administrative burden, because all the individual specializations will no longer have to be assessed. In addition, cyclical institutional accreditation would promote accountability and provide a broader picture of the quality of the institute.

Conclusions

Norway and Denmark have institutional accreditation and programme accreditation for new study programmes at institutes that have been granted conditional accreditation. The Estonian system partly resembles those of Norway and Denmark, in that there is institutional accreditation every three or seven years, but combined with quality assessments of study programme groups (from 2019, random, theme-based assessments of programmes). In Scotland, there is an institute review every six years to assess whether an institute's performance is completely effective, partially effective or

ineffective. Latvia uses three quality assurance processes: accreditation of institutes of higher education, accreditation of specializations and licensing of study programmes. The Flemish quality assurance system focuses on the quality of individual programmes and accountability for them. This is done either through an institute review that gives the universities and universities of applied sciences themselves the opportunity to be guarantors of the quality of their study programmes, or through an assessment at programme level by an external assessment body or a quality assurance organization. In all the countries, there is first of all self-reflection or self-evaluation, after which external 'peers' and stakeholders assess this evaluation and make an inspection visit to the institute. Accreditation is either granted by the accreditation organization (or accreditation council) or a recommendation is submitted to the Ministry. In most countries (but not Flanders), formats are used for self-evaluation, but there is often room to deviate from them.

Institutional accreditation is standard in all countries, while there may be exceptions for small institutes, for example. Failure to obtain accreditation has various different consequences. If an Estonian institute does not obtain accreditation, it is given two years to correct the shortcomings; otherwise the Ministry can immediately withdraw the 'education licence'. In Flanders, a negative decision regarding an institute review means that the accreditation organization will again provide the external quality assurance at programme level. In Norway, the Ministry can alter the status of the accreditation of an institute if there are major concerns about quality. In Scotland, there seem to be few consequences attached to the failure to pass an assessment: an institute is then presented with a number of priority areas in which it needs to take action. No distinction is made between public, private or state institutes.

All countries have a direct or indirect form of accreditation of new study programmes, but there are differences in the focus of the accreditation and who carries it out. Nowhere do institutes have a completely independent right to assess and accredit programmes. Taking into account national criteria and considerations, no programme assessment, or only a limited assessment, is generally needed for existing programmes.

Recommendations

In most countries, there was a need for a more systematic method of quality assurance, centralized at national level. Furthermore, for most countries it was important for institutes of higher education to be accorded greater autonomy and responsibility for the quality of education. Lightening the administrative burden and the desire to make the process less bureaucratic and detailed was a reason for such moves in most of the countries. On the whole, there is satisfaction with the way in which institutional accreditation is organized. It must be noted here that in most countries, institutional

accreditation is still very much in development. It places clear responsibility for the quality of education with the institutes of higher education, with the core concepts quality culture, greater ownership, transparency and confidence, and the maintenance of an individual identity and autonomy. Noticeable features are the difference between the countries in periods of recovery and, in some countries, differences in the quality and knowledge of the reviewers. The administrative burden remains fairly high, in particular due to overlap between different evaluations or different criteria. However, the documentation required for accreditation is seen by institutes as predominantly relevant, although in some cases it is considered redundant. Institutional accreditation makes a positive contribution to professionalization, developing quality assurance procedures and embedding these procedures in management.

The analysis of other countries' experiences with institutional accreditation provides a number of interesting insights for the Dutch context. Reasons for introducing institutional accreditation were very similar in the six countries studied, with the caveat that the situation and previous history in Latvia diverged strongly from the Dutch situation. In all the countries, the main reasons were (1) the aim of achieving more autonomy, ownership and involvement within institutes, and (2) greater quality awareness and higher quality, partly as a result of increased ownership. Reducing the administrative burden is also often mentioned as a reason, but not as a priority – or in some cases not an achievable – aim in most countries. Only in Scotland is the principal motivation a desire to bring the administrative burden of institutional accreditation felt by staff more in line with the outcomes of the accreditation system.

In the Netherlands, the main reasons for introducing institutional accreditation are to achieve greater confidence and autonomy at educational institutes. In view of this, a first important conclusion is that in all the countries studied, the results of institutional accreditation as regards a reduced administrative burden are limited, absent or even negative. There are several reasons for this: burdens as a result of the internal quality assurance of study programmes remain intact; institutional accreditation leads to a new administrative burden; and, specifically for small institutes, institutional accreditation is relatively time-consuming.

Moreover, in the countries where there are still double procedures, there is clearly a greater administrative burden. In general, institutes would benefit if they could spread the burden more evenly and thus be better able to regulate the pressure of work. In some countries, the necessary effort is felt to be more worthwhile, in view of the better results. The results of the efforts to achieve greater autonomy, ownership and a more developed quality culture can be seen in most of the countries studied. On balance, institutional accreditation receives sufficient support and appreciation in the countries.

Translated to the Dutch situation, the recommendation is that the Netherlands should not focus explicitly on the reduction of the administrative burden as the main driver, but rather should emphasize aspects such as growing the quality culture; opportunities for customization; internal involvement; and the impetus that institutional accreditation gives to informing stakeholders better and involving them more closely in the quality and innovative nature of study programmes, as well as their relevance to the labour market. At the same time, it is important to investigate thoroughly the possibilities of reducing the administrative burden in an institutional accreditation system. After all, this study shows that the administrative burden does not decrease as a matter of course following the introduction of institutional accreditation. Potentially interesting approaches can be distilled from the country descriptions, such as (1) giving small institutes or those that do not want institutional accreditation for another reason the choice of opting for the accreditation of programmes or random checks of programmes; (2) space for customization; and (3) basing actions on the dialogue about quality assurance within an institute, instead of basing accreditation specifically on written sources.

Areas of concern in other countries that are relevant to the Netherlands are the issues of involving external peers and stakeholders sufficiently in quality assurance at both institute and programme level, and giving institutes scope to establish their own individual identities. This scope is created through a heterogeneous approach. Furthermore, good communication regarding centralized and decentralized frameworks and quality guarantees is important to all stakeholders in order for them to have lasting confidence in the quality of institutes and each individual study programme. Institutional accreditation also imposes new requirements for internal management and communication. With the right approach, institutes will be able to enjoy the benefits of stronger quality awareness and increased involvement of employees, stakeholders and students. An approach that is not as good could actually increase negativity regarding internal bureaucratic checks.

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