

**Investing in Quality of Education**  
***Quality agreements 2019-2024***

Amsterdam

9 April 2018

Translated by Naomi van den Berg

In this document, the minister of Education, Culture and Science (Dutch acronym: OCW), the public universities of applied sciences represented by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), the public universities represented by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Dutch Student Union (LSVb), and the Dutch National Student Association (ISO) establish their arrangements regarding the formulation and implementation of the quality agreements for higher education.

This text has also been included in the *Sectorakkoord hbo-2018* and the *Sectorakkoord wo-2018*, which provide a relevant context to the agreements made as described below.

The undersigned agree on the following:

*Investing advances of study funds via quality agreements*

The quality agreements concern the entirety of publicly funded applied sciences education (Dutch acronym: hbo) and academic education (Dutch acronym: wo), and will apply for the period from 2019 to 2024.

The coalition agreements state that resources freed up by advances of study funds are linked to 'quality agreements at the institutional level'. There is a broad support for the elaboration thereof in close dialogue with the education community, and, where relevant, with involvement of the partners in the area. Students, universities of applied sciences, universities, and the minister of OCW picked up the gauntlet and made commitments regarding the quality agreements.

With the resources provided by the advances of study funds, a visible improvement in the quality of education is aimed for. In this regard, we owe the students a delivery of this promise. By making pre-investments, universities and universities of applied sciences have already provided an impetus for the quality of higher education, and by mobilizing the resources of the advances of study funds, they aim to continue and further expand this impetus.

Substantively, this means we continue the approach as set out by the Strategic Agenda (Dutch: Strategische Agenda) of 2015 and the Common Agenda (Dutch: Gemeenschappelijke Agenda) of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), VSNU, ISO and LSVb, focusing on achieving greater attention for the personal and social education of students, more emphasis on progressing through the education chain, and a more solid embedding of the applied sciences in the institution's area.

Based on the above considerations, institutions formulate intentions and goals for the following themes of improvement of the quality of education: more intensive and small-scaled education (education intensity); educational differentiation, including but not limited to talent development both within and outside of the study program; further professionalization of teachers (teacher quality); fitting and adequate educational facilities; more and better guidance for students; study success including progression, accessibility and equal opportunities. The annex provides further details on what is meant with these themes.

### *Local implementation*

The shared themes for the allocation of resources are translated on a local level by institutions through concrete measures and policy. This occurs through a dialogue between students, teachers, relevant external stakeholders (businesses, civil society organizations, other educational institutions, regional governments), executives, participation council and regulatory body members. The institution presents a plan of what it aspires to achieve by 2024 with the use of the advances of study funds. In this plan detailing the use of the advances of study funds, the intended expenditures (henceforth referred to as 'intentions') are included in relation to the six nationally agreed upon themes, as well as the goals the institution aims to achieve via said expenditures. Intentions and goals may apply to the entire institution, but also to specific parts thereof, or to specific groups of students. For all six themes, the institution either describes the intentions and the associated goals aimed for in relation to the theme in question, or explains why they do not intend to invest the advances of study funds in a certain theme. In doing so, the institution explicitly expresses how their choices fit within the broader education intentions and education vision of the institution and the history and context of the institution, which may be interpreted by the institution to include a multiannual development of the institution's budget.

In this plan, the institution also formulates which progress they aim to have made by 2021, following the realization of their intentions.

The plan of the institution for the use of advances of study funds can be embedded in a new institutional plan, but can also for instance become an addendum to an already existing institutional plan.

Parties agree that the institutions provide rights to the participation council to consent the plan of the institution prior to the mobilization of the advances of study funds. On top of that, the institutions provide the participation council with the right to consent to the part of the annual budget that concerns the advances of study funds, based on the consideration that advances of study funds are part of the outline of the institution's budget. This implies the multi-year budget as included in the plan taking further shape. The board and the participation council together agree which process will be followed in order to move towards the plan for the use of advances of study funds. The participation council shall be involved in a timely fashion and therefore be granted the opportunity to suggest ideas. The board and the participation council together ensure a broad involvement of the community of the university and university of applied sciences and make mutual agreements regarding which forums can be involved in the process of realizing the plan.

The multi-year budget that the institution includes in their plan provides an insight into what the institution intends to spend the advances of study funds on. This way, accountability regarding the spending of resources and which goals will be realized can be provided to both the students and, more broadly, the parliament and society.

Institutions may have done pre-investments - prior to the transfer of the advances of study funds - which they may not have done without the prospect of said funds. Where desired, the institution may indicate this in their plan, and they may choose to continue previous spending via the pre-investments in 2015-2017 by using the advances of study funds.

As of 2019, in the annual reports of the institution, the institution reserves a separate chapter each year in which they provide accountability regarding the progress of the content and process. This also concerns the agreements with the participation regarding the spending of the advances of study funds. Already prior to this, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), VSNU and the student organizations have agreed that the central participation council is granted the opportunity to report independently on the spending of the advances of study funds. This occurs through an annex to the annual report. The functioning of the right to consent is discussed in the participation council monitor, which is released every two years.

The universities and universities of applied sciences will make sure that the participation council is well facilitated in entering a good dialogue with the institution. Universities and universities of applied sciences shall support and facilitate the participation council in execution of their tasks, such as providing a toolkit for assessing the outlines of the budget or providing sufficient time. OCW shall facilitate that, for specific questions by the participation council, a national desk is instituted by ISO, LSVb, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), and VSNU. The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen), VSNU and student organizations ISO and LSVb have concluded that a good participation by the participation council in a broad sense and regarding the quality agreements is important for universities and universities of applied sciences. For this reason, they made agreements regarding the facilitation of time of the student members in the participation council. Big universities and universities of applied sciences require the student members of their central participation that they be available for a minimum of 8 hours per week, and for universities and universities of applied sciences of fewer than 10 thousand students, a minimum of 4 hours applies. For these minimum standards, a “comply or explain” principle applies.

Parties agree that the plans for the use of advances of study funds, following the consent by the participation council, shall be presented for approval to the supervisory board.

#### *Independent assessment*

The plans and the realization of the plans are assessed independently. For this purpose, these are aligned with the process of (voluntary) institutional quality assurance criteria (Dutch acronym: ITK), which is conducted by the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). It is expected that the majority of the institutions participate in the ITK-cycle. This way, few additional burdens are associated with the assessment of the quality agreements and the duty of this task lies with an existing supervisory organization in higher education. To the ITK-process, which is based on the assessment by a panel and a panel visit to the institution, a separate trail for the quality agreements is added. This trail leads to a separate advice to the minister of OCW regarding the plan of the institution to mobilize the advances of study funds. This means that this advice is distinct from the NVAO-decision in respect to the ITK. For institutions that do not participate in the ITK, a separate process is designed, which is also based on an assessment by a panel that pays a visit to the institution. For the few institutions that have already completed their second ITK, a

'third trail light' is designed using (a part of) the panel that was also involved in the ITK.

There are three assessment periods: assessment of the plans, an assessment in the fall of 2022, and an evaluation at the end. At any of these three periods, the assessments by the NVAO can lead to advice specific to each institution given to the minister of OCW. Before the assessment takes place, an assessment framework will be established that is in line with the arrangements as stipulated in this agreement. Descriptions of which points shall be considered for each assessment period are provided below.

### *Assessment of plans*

The plan of the institution will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- The plan contributes, in a well-reasoned manner, to improvement of the quality of education. The institution's intentions with the advances of study funds and the goals it thus aims to achieve in the six themes are all clearly formulated and are commensurate with the context, history and overall (educational) vision of the institution.
- The internal stakeholders are sufficiently involved with drafting the plan and there is sufficient support from internal and relevant external stakeholders.
- The intentions included in the plan are feasible given the suggested use of tools and means as well as the organization and processes within the institution.

### *Assessment in 2022*

In 2022, an assessment of the realization of the plans up to 2021 takes place. Criteria in this assessment are:

- The institution has made sufficient progress with the realization of its intentions, considering the efforts made and the ways unforeseen circumstances were dealt with.
- The participation council and other relevant stakeholders are sufficiently involved during the execution of the plan.

In order to assess these points, the institution itself takes stock of the progress in the annual report for 2021. A reflection by the participation council regarding the realization of the plan up to that point, the involvement of the stakeholders and the facilitation of the participation council is added to this report. The annual report for 2021 and the reflection by the participation council form the basis for the assessment by the NVAO. If these documents would give cause to do so, the NVAO will enter a discussion with the institution and may request (a part of) the panel that has executed the plan assessment to pay another visit to the institution.

### *Evaluation*

The evaluation of the realization of the plan at the end is, to those institutions that partake in the ITK, once again part of the ITK-process. It concerns the next cycle of ITK. Institutions that do not partake in the ITK are provided the evaluation of their realization six years after the assessment of the plan for quality agreements. This means that the evaluation does not occur at the same time for all institutions. A number of institutions already have a new ITK planned for 2023, others only at the start of 2026. Apart from the evaluation of this round of quality agreements, the ITK-cycle

starting in 2023 may also incorporate the assessment of a next round of plans for quality agreements. It is up to the new government to decide on whether or not to continue the current system of quality agreements. The decision-making regarding this matter will take place prior to the start of the new ITK-cycle.

Like the assessment of the plans for the use of advances of study funds, the evaluation is an assessment that is based on a panel and a visit to the institution. Existing documents will be used for the evaluation, namely the annual reports of the institution (the most recent annual report in particular) and - just like the assessment in 2022 - a reflection by the participation council.

Just like the assessment in 2022, the criteria of the evaluation are:

- The institution has sufficiently realized its intentions for the period up to and including 2024, considering the efforts made and the ways unforeseen circumstances were dealt with.
- The participation council and other relevant stakeholders are sufficiently involved during the execution of the plan.

### *Funding*

The legal foundations upon which the minister of OCW can grant the advances of study funds in the form of complementary funds - the so-called funding for quality agreements - are set out in a general order in council, which is based on article 2.6 of the *Higher Education and Academic Research Act* (HEARA, Dutch acronym: WHW). This general order of council contains, among others, the substantive themes upon which the institutions are ought to base their intentions and goals, as well as the period for which the quality funding will be awarded.

For universities of applied sciences, the advances of study funds are distributed in proportion to the share of a university of applied sciences in student-related financing and the educational raises in percentages over a year. For universities, the advances of study funds are distributed in proportion to the share of a university in student-related financing in a year. A table of the advances of study funds available to universities (Dutch acronym: wo) and universities of applied sciences (Dutch acronym: hbo) in the period from 2019 to 2024 is provided below.

*(only translating the words in this table)*

...	2019	2020, etc.
90% advances of study funds		
Of which HBO		
Increase 2023 - 2024 for possible financial consequences HBO		
Of which WO		
Increase 2023 - 2024 for possible financial consequences HBO		

\* All numbers in the table are rounded, possibly causing summations to deviate.

Given these quality agreements, which both the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen) on behalf of all the universities of applied sciences and the VSNU on behalf of all the universities endorse, the advances of study funds for 2019 and 2020 are provided as unconditional lump sum payments (for universities of applied sciences in proportion to the share of the university of applied sciences in student-related financing and the educational raises in percentages over a year, and for universities in proportion to the share of a university in student-related financing in a year).

In the period to April 2020, plans of the institutions are assessed by the NVAO. In case of a positive advice by the NVAO regarding the plan as well as a positive decision by the minister, the institution will receive the advances of study funds in the form of quality funding for the period 2021 to and including 2024.

The minister enters a conversation with the institutions that were initially provided a negative assessment by the NVAO regarding their plan. If the minister decides to adopt the advice of the NVAO, this institution will be granted the opportunity to submit a new plan within a year that does meet the criteria. If, after this period, the judgement by the minister (on the basis of an advice of the NVAO) is still 'insufficient', the presumption is that the advances of study funds for the years 2021 to and including 2024 are not granted to the institution in question. These resources for this period are then distributed proportionally to the other universities or universities of applied sciences.

If, following the assessment in 2022, it is concluded that insufficient progress is made in the realization of the plan of an institution, the minister will also engage in a conversation with the institution and the institution will be granted a year to show that they are in fact making substantial progress. In the fall of 2023, the NVAO assesses whether sufficient progress is made, based on a reflection by the institution itself, as well as a reflection by the participation council. If, following this year, the progress is still deemed unsatisfactory, the amount of advances of study funds of 2024 that exceeds those of 2023 (the net 'increase') will be cut. This amount will be made available in 2024 via the Comenius program to teachers of the institution in question that submit proposals regarding educational innovation and improvement, unless the minister decides to deviate from this system for a specific institution for justifiable reasons. Via this route, these resources will still be spent on the improvement of educational quality at the institution in question.

Since the Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (Dutch acronym: NRO) will assess the quality of the (Comenius) proposals submitted by teachers, there is a possibility that the means for that institution will not be depleted. In that case, any surplus will go back to the lump sum, and it will be distributed among all universities and universities of applied sciences.

There are no financial repercussions linked to the evaluation of the realization of the plan for the mobilization of the advances of study funds. The institutions use the results of the evaluation for their own strategy formation and, if a new government again opts for quality agreements, they may also use them for the formation of their plan for the next period. On top of that, the minister will enter a discussion with those institutions that were deemed insufficient by the NVAO.

### *Keeping track of national developments*

The quality agreements offer institutions the opportunity to make their own decisions in terms of the improvement of the quality of education. The progress of quality agreements is monitored at the institutional level, as described above. At the same time, parties wish to see the meaning of quality agreements on a national level when it comes to the improvement of the quality of education. For this reason, the NVAO will form an independent national analysis of the state of affairs with regard to the quality agreements. This analysis will be based on the plans and the start of the execution thereof. On the basis of the mid-term review in 2022, the NVAO will compose a national analysis as such. For these national analyses, the NVAO may request additional information from the institutions.

**Dutch Student Union (Dutch acronym: LSVb) based in Utrecht, acting as representative of students, represented by:**

Tariq Sewbaransingh

**Dutch National Student Association (Dutch acronym: ISO) based in Utrecht, acting as representative of students, represented by:**

Rhea van der Dong

**The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Dutch: Vereniging Hogescholen) based in the Hague, acting as representative of universities of applied sciences, referred to in item g of the annex to the Higher Education and Academic Research Act (Dutch: Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek), represented by:**

Thom de Graaf

**Association of Universities in the Netherlands (Dutch acronym: VSNU) based in the Hague, in this matter acting as representative of universities, as referred to in items a, b, h, and i of the annex to the Higher Education and Academic Research Act (Dutch: Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek), represented by:**

Pieter Duisenberg

**The minister of Education, Culture and Science, acting as the governing body and representative of the State of the Netherlands:**

Ingrid van Engelshoven

## **Annex I: Elaboration of the quality agreement themes**

### **More intensive and small-scaled education**

The relationship between teachers and students is crucial for good education. That is why it is important to further intensify the contact between students and teachers. This can be done by, for example, focusing on smaller tutorial groups and community-formation, and by freeing up more time for personal feedback and individual guidance. In order to achieve this, further expansion of the number of teachers per students is necessary. Appointing more teachers also allows for the content of education to be linked to societal themes and research, which possibly enhances the curiosity of students and their research capacities.

### **More and better guidance for students**

It is the responsibility of the universities and universities of applied sciences to provide equal opportunities to all students, regardless of their background, origin or educational background. Not only incidentally when things threaten to get out of hand, but also proactively and structurally. For this reason, intensive guidance and support by for instance professionally trained tutors, study advisors, student-psychologists, student deans and study career counsellors are taken into account. Better guidance prevents problems and ensures optimal development of all students.

### **Study success**

All students that have the necessary skills should be given the opportunity to successfully start and complete their studies. Attention to transfer through educational programs and accessibility of education for students coming from secondary education (Dutch acronym: vo) and secondary vocational education (Dutch acronym: mbo), equal opportunities, including higher education, the prevention of dropouts and the improvement of study success remain important themes for higher education. On the basis of an analysis of study success of the student population, an institution may decide to focus its attention primarily on certain groups of students and/or education programs, and establish objectives accordingly.

### **Educational differentiation**

Universities of applied sciences and universities tailor to different backgrounds and ambitions of students, and demands of the labor market. They do this by offering a diverse range of educational pathways in various levels (Ad, Ba, Ma). Additionally, they invest in talent programs, such as *honours* programs or programs in the field of civic engagement, entrepreneurship, arts or sports. On top of that, universities and universities of applied sciences can differentiate in didactic educational concepts.

### **Fitting and adequate educational facilities**

It is of importance that the study facilities and infrastructure improve intensive and small-scaled education. Digital resources may be integrated into the educational process even better: students must be able to make the most of their educational environment - both physically and digitally - during their study process. Study facilities and infrastructure must meet the requirements of education of the future.

### **Further professionalization of teachers (teacher quality)**

Good and involved teachers are key in achieving quality education. Efforts can be targeted at further professionalization of teachers. This goes hand in hand with more

appreciation of the activities of teachers, for instance by focusing more attention on educational achievements in academic education. Teachers must also be able to stay up to date with the latest substantive, didactic and digital developments. It may help to be able to share one's own educational materials, as well as being able to utilize that of others. Teachers should be offered more opportunities to develop their own skills, for instance, in case of hbo-teachers, by conducting their own research.