



NVAO • NETHERLANDS

ADVISORY REPORT QUALITY AGREEMENTS  
PLAN ASSESSMENT  
Maastricht University 007855

*DATE OF VISIT: 26-10-2018*

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## Table of contents

Summary .....	4
Overall conclusion.....	4
<b>1</b> Institution's profile.....	5
1.1    General data .....	5
1.2    Institution's profile .....	5
<b>2</b> Appreciation per criterion.....	6
2.1    Criterion 1 .....	6
2.1.1    Findings .....	6
2.1.2    Considerations .....	7
2.1.3    Conclusion.....	8
2.2    Criterion 2 .....	8
2.2.1    Findings .....	8
2.2.2    Considerations .....	9
2.2.3    Conclusion.....	10
2.3    Criterion 3 .....	10
2.3.1    Findings .....	10
2.3.2    Considerations .....	11
2.3.3    Conclusion.....	11

## Summary

### Overall conclusion

In the previous sections, the panel judged that Maastricht University complies with all three criteria by which its plans for using revenues from the student loan system in the period 2019-2024 are to be assessed. The panel's overall judgement on UM's Quality Agreement plans is therefore positive.

The panel draws this conclusion first and foremost because the six priorities of UM's Quality Agreement plans constitute a very good match with the vision of the university and the actions presented in the Strategic Programme, because there has been a very good involvement of the entire UM community in developing the plans, and because the ambitions have been formulated in such a clear way that they can be monitored and evaluated properly. Furthermore, the panel considers that Maastricht University fulfils entirely and comprehensively the effects that were stipulated for each criterion in the assessment Protocol.

Hence, the panel advises NVAO to issue a positive recommendation to the minister on the plan for the Quality Agreements of Maastricht University.

The Hague, 17 January 2019.

On behalf of the panel for the appointment of the appreciation of the quality agreements plan of the Maastricht University,

Janke Cohen-Schotanus  
(chair)

Mark Delmartino  
(secretary)

## **1 Institution's profile**

### **1.1 General data**

Country	Nederland
Institution	Maastricht University
Location(s)	Maastricht
Institution's status	Funded

### **1.2 Institution's profile**

In the Sector Agreement, signed in April 2018 by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Dutch National Students' Association and the Dutch Student Union, it is stipulated that all universities develop a plan for the allocation of the study advance means. The plan aims at a clear and visible improvement of the quality of education in the period 2019-2024. Six themes were identified as focus areas for the quality improvement plans: (i) intensive and small-scale education; (ii) student guidance; (iii) study success; (iv) education differentiation; (v) facilities; and (vi) professional development of teachers.

Maastricht University chose to develop its plans for the Quality Agreements in a parallel process to the Institutional Audit and the CeQuInt procedures since the topic of quality of education is central in all three reviews. The reflections on CeQuInt and the Institutional Audit have offered a useful contribution to specify UM's ambitions regarding the improvement of the educational quality in relation to the six national Quality Agreement themes.

The expert panel, which was convened by NVAO to perform an assessment of the university according to both Institutional Audit and CeQuInt procedures, was also tasked to assess UM's plans regarding the Quality Agreements. Maastricht University is the first higher education institution in the Netherlands to submit its Quality Agreement plans for review. In drafting this advisory report, the panel was guided by NVAO's Protocol Assessment of Quality Agreements Higher Education (May 2018). The panel's findings are based on the report which Maastricht University has produced on the Quality Agreements 2019-2024, on the discussions it had throughout its site visit from 22 until 26 October 2018 and in particular on the two sessions during this visit dedicated exclusively to the Quality Agreements.

## 2 Appreciation per criterion

### 2.1 Criterion 1

*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 named educational quality themes are clearly formulated and are in keeping with the institute's context, history and broad vision.*

#### 2.1.1 Findings

The panel gathered from the discussions that the six overall themes of the Quality Agreements have been set at national level and that Maastricht University has made a conscious - extensively discussed - choice to address in its own Quality Agreement plan a specific component of each theme. Although the university could have decided to only address a few themes, the interviewees emphasised that they did not choose to do so because for the university, there is some room for improvement on every theme.

Having read the reports for both the Institutional Audit and the Quality Agreements, the panel noticed that the six priorities which UM identified to enhance the quality of education through the Quality Agreements 2019-2024 are concrete translations of the university's vision on education and of the ambitions mentioned in its Strategic Programme 2017-2021.

Furthermore, the panel noticed in the report that all six themes have been described extensively and that by doing so, the university has built a compelling case for each topic. The panel gathers from the materials that:

- regarding theme 1, intensive and small-scale education, the university wants to revitalise the delivery of problem-based learning in a small and intensive setting;
- regarding theme 2, student guidance, the university wants to increase the support services for students and enhance the quality of staff in student guidance positions;
- regarding theme 3, study success, the university wants to create a new vision on assessment in relation to the problem-based learning principles;
- regarding theme 4, education differentiation, the university wants to invest in the employability of its students, in Global Citizenship Education and in the validation of meaningful extra-curricular student experiences;
- regarding theme 5, appropriate facilities, the university wants to provide ample study places for students and common rooms where students and staff can meet informally;
- regarding theme 6, professional development of teaching staff, the university wants to develop a programme of continuing professional development where staff members can make choices on what, when and how they learn.

Several interviewees indicated that the topics were identified in a concerted effort of students, staff and management. A very important point of departure in these discussions was that the topics would reflect what students really wanted. While there was something to be gained for the university on every theme, the students clearly set priorities across the topics: from the students' point of view, priority should be given to smaller PBL classes, more student guidance and better staff development opportunities. The panel gathered from the

materials and the discussions that this prioritisation is reflected in the budget allocation to the respective themes.

The panel observed that some topics require a greater involvement of the central services, while other topics are addressed within the faculties. In consultation with the participatory bodies it has been decided that the means are allocated to either the faculties or the central level considering the most effective deployment of the means. Central allocation of the means is maximised to 10% of the total budget per year.

Given that students had an important voice in setting the topics and the priorities, the panel noticed with satisfaction that several topics and a considerable amount of funding are dedicated to teaching staff. Interviewees indicated that the continuous professional development of teaching staff is the common ground where the concerns of students (educational quality) meet the concerns of staff (workload). Both the quality of education and the work pressure are topics that are interwoven and require a balanced approach. The panel learned that the Executive Board and the University Council see it as their task to realise the required improvement of education without further increasing the workload of the staff. As a result, the various plans around the six themes should indicate how the envisaged interventions can be implemented with no further consequences for the workload.

### 2.1.2 Considerations

Based on the written information provided in the Quality Agreements report and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the six priorities constitute a very good match with the vision of the university and the actions presented in the Strategic Programme.

The panel considers that each specific topic in the Quality Agreements is directed towards improving the quality of education. According to the panel, these topics are likely to be effective because they enhance and strengthen the educational vision of Maastricht University.

The panel thinks highly of the careful and respectful way in which management, students and staff have decided on the topics and the priorities. According to the panel, the topics presented in the plan do justice to all stakeholders, contribute to an increase in the quality of education and hence are of major benefit to the ultimate target group, the students at UM.

In sum, the panel considers that in terms of improved educational quality, Maastricht University fulfils entirely and comprehensively the requirements for this criterion. The panel confirms that:

- for each of the six educational quality themes, the university has made a clear choice;
- for each theme UM has provided a reasoned account of how it intends to spend the revenues from the student loan system and what they intend to achieve through these proposals;
- the university has justified these choices in relation to their broader educational proposals, vision, history and context;
- the proposals and aims make a reasoned contribution to improving educational quality.

### **2.1.3 Conclusion**

The panel judges that Maastricht University complies with criterion 1, improved educational quality.

## **2.2 Criterion 2**

*The internal stakeholders are sufficiently involved with the drawing up of the plan and there is sufficient support among internal and external stakeholders.*

### **2.2.1 Findings**

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussion on site that many stakeholders have been involved in the Quality Agreements plan. Several interviewees indicated that it had been the idea right from the start to develop a plan that would not only be ambitious and feasible, but also one that would reflect both the UM-wide context and the faculty-specific concerns.

The panel observed that the key actors in the development of the plans have been on the one hand the Executive Board (EB) and on the other hand the students and staff from the University Council (UC). Once the main ambitions had been framed, both EB and UC have shared their ideas widely across the university in order to get feedback and suggestions. Given the short timeframe in which the plans had to take shape, the EB and UC met with all faculties through the Faculty Boards, the Faculty Councils and several Education Programme Committees.

As part of the regular Institutional Audit programme, the panel spoke to three representatives of the Supervisory Board (SB). They shared that the SB had followed-up the development of the Quality Agreements plan with interest because the plan would bring additional budget to the university. Moreover, the SB representatives pointed out that this budget was not a lump sum but had to be accounted for in a specific way: the money should be spent along the budget lines of the plan and its six themes. Finally, the SB members confirmed that they had approved the final version of the Quality Agreement plan and ensured the panel that they would continue to follow its implementation.

The panel learned that also the broader UM community had been involved by means of so-called reflection sessions with board members of student and study associations, educational staff in different positions, and external stakeholders. On request of the students, the plans were discussed among others with representatives of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. Several interviewees indicated to the panel that they would have liked to involve more alumni and external stakeholders in the discussions. However, the timeframe was short and given that this was the very first Quality Agreements procedure in the Netherlands, it would have taken too much time to properly brief external stakeholders. Nonetheless, the panel was informed that alumni and external representatives will be taken on board more comprehensively in the next phases of the Quality Agreements.

Interviewees representing the faculties indicated to the panel that they had appreciated the way in which the plan had been drafted. They emphasised that concerns of individual faculties about specific themes had either been taken on board in the plan or that the set-up of the plans allowed for an implementation that would reflect these particularities.

The report contained a letter from the University Council to the Executive Board expressing their “appreciation for the constructive way in which the discussions on the Quality Agreements have taken place.” During the visit, the UC chair confirmed this appreciation and provided the panel with similar letters from all six Faculty Councils confirming their agreement to the plan and expressing their appreciation for the constructive and inclusive way in which the discussions had been held.

Several interviewees indicated that they remain involved in the next stages of the Quality Agreements: the EB will continue to work together with the UC, and both bodies will discuss the execution of the ambitions in more detail with their counterparts at faculty level, the Faculty Boards and Faculty Councils. Several student representatives confirmed that they are still involved at both central and faculty levels: the cooperation is working well, and they are very much encouraged to follow-up the next stages of the plan.

Finally, a few people mentioned that the development of plans (and self-evaluation reports) for the three audits had brought the various stakeholders within the institution closer to each other. Students mentioned that now the lines with management and staff are short; the chairs of the UC and the respective Faculty Councils are now meeting more often and on a structural basis; and the Executive Board confided to the panel that they now know much more people within the university and that their network of first-line contacts has expanded enormously.

#### 2.2.2 Considerations

Based on the written information provided in the Quality Agreements report and the discussions on site, the panel considers that there has been a very good involvement of the entire UM community in developing the Quality Agreement plan.

The panel thinks very highly of the internal processes that exist within the university to rally both staff and students around a common cause. According to the panel, setting up a parallel process of consultation and discussion between and among the central and the faculty levels is an example of good practice. The enthusiasm of the interviewees and the written confirmations from the Faculty Councils and the UC chair prove according to the panel that the process has been very effective for all parties.

Given that according to the mission of the university, “we see ourselves first and foremost as an open and inclusive academic community”, the panel considers that the management at UM has been leading by example in the case of the Quality Agreement plan.

In sum, the panel considers that in terms of stakeholder involvement, Maastricht University fulfills entirely and comprehensively the requirements for this criterion. The panel confirms that:

- the proposals for the plan have been arrived at in consultation with the participatory bodies, internal monitors and after consultations with external stakeholders;
- the management and the participatory bodies jointly ensure the broad-based involvement of the university community; the participatory bodies have been sufficiently involved, as fully-fledged partners, with the creation of the plan;
- the plan shows that sufficient involvement of the participatory bodies is safeguarded during the realisation of the policy;

- participatory bodies are facilitated to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively;
- the participatory bodies have given their consent to the plan;
- the Supervisory Board has approved the plan.

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

The panel judges that Maastricht University complies with criterion 2, stakeholder involvement.

## 2.3 Criterion 3

*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.*

### 2.3.1 Findings

The panel noticed that the report contains a table which describes for each theme the ambitions, policy processes, envisaged outcomes, timeline and provisions for monitoring. The table contains clear indications on the situation of the ambitions at this planning stage of the Quality Agreements process. The panel gathered from the materials and the discussions that the ambitions require fine-tuning in line with the faculty-specific areas of improvement and the concrete plans to address these. Moreover, some of the ambitions require a more precise development into a UM-wide plan. In all cases, the fine-tuning will be based on careful dialogue between Faculty Boards, Faculty Councils and sometimes Education Programme Committees.

The panel learned that the process of monitoring and evaluation was agreed upon by the Executive Board and the University Council. The University Council members will play an active role in the monitoring process. The Executive Board will receive a yearly progress update from the faculties and the service centres. The monitoring processes of the Quality Agreements are designed in such a way that there is optimal transparency with only minimal additional bureaucracy. When possible, the monitoring and evaluation of the Quality Agreements will be linked to regular quality assurance processes. In order to ensure direct involvement and accountability, the responsibility for implementing the policy measures is placed where the actions take place.

The ambitions described in the Quality Agreements are formulated as ultimate goals to be reached by 2024. The panel understood that the actions and outputs to realise these ambitions are spread over time: in 2021 a mid-term review will be undertaken, monitoring the progress made regarding each ambition. The panel noticed in the report that the ultimate ambitions have been translated in several mid-term perspectives that should be implemented by the end of 2021. According to the panel, these perspectives are realistic and formulated in a way that is sufficiently concrete and measurable.

The panel gathered from the discussion on the management information system (in the framework of the Institutional Audit) that the ambitions of the Quality Agreements are currently being incorporated in the system and will be monitored carefully in the future. At the same time several baseline measurements are taking place to identify the level of development at the start of the Quality Agreements and in order to decide on the potential results – overall and per faculty - that can be achieved given the baseline situation. Furthermore, the panel learned from the discussions that not every ambition is measurable in

a quantitative way but requires a trade-off between qualitative and quantitative indicators of achievement.

Further to what was already mentioned in the previous section, the panel understands that a good number of bodies and individuals who were involved in the planning stages of the Quality Agreements, continue to play an important role in the current fine-tuning of the plans and will also monitor the progress and evaluate the outcomes. Several interviewees mentioned that they are part of the fortnightly meetings between faculties and central services to work out the implementation plans for each faculty. In these meetings the plans on every ambition follow a streamlined format which facilitates the discussion across faculties. Moreover, there are teams in each faculty: for instance, the Faculty of Law has a working group that focuses on the implementation of the ambitions and consists of six members from the Faculty Council, Faculty Board and Education Programme Committees. Students who are represented in the respective Faculty Councils gather informally while a delegation with student representatives from each faculty meets with the Executive Board.

### 2.3.2 Considerations

Based on the written information in the report and the discussions on site, the panel considers that the ambitions have been formulated clearly and allow to be monitored and evaluated accordingly. While the ambitions still require some fine-tuning in order to make them operational in each faculty or UM-wide, the university has at disposition clear provisions for monitoring. The panel thinks highly of the principles the university has developed in order to align the monitoring and evaluation processes of the Quality Agreement plan with the regular internal quality assurance provisions of UM.

Furthermore, the panel considers that the ambitions for 2024 have been translated adequately in mid-term outputs whose realisation can be monitored and evaluated by the end of 2021.

The panel commends the university for ensuring a good deal of continuation in the structures and the individuals that were involved in the planning stages, are now fine-tuning the ambitions and will monitor the progress in due time.

In sum, the panel considers that in terms of realisation of ambitions, Maastricht University fulfils entirely and comprehensively the requirements for this criterion. The panel confirms that:

- the university has adequately translated its plan into concrete policy actions and processes;
- the internal and external stakeholders regard the proposals as achievable and feasible;
- UM can demonstrate that it will monitor the progress of the agreements and the attainment of its objectives, and can modify its proposals where necessary;
- the university has shown what monitoring processes it will be applying and how it will involve internal and external stakeholders in this process.

### 2.3.3 Conclusion

The panel judges that Maastricht University complies with criterion 3, realisation of ambitions.

**The advisory report was commissioned by the NVAO in view of the appreciation of the Maastricht University.**

**Application number: 007855**

**Colophon**

Advisory Report  
Maastricht University  
Quality Agreements Plan Appreciation  
*26-10-2018*  
Formation: NVAO • NETHERLANDS



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**NVAO**

## KWALITEITSAFSPRAKEN Maastricht University

**Onderwerp**

Factsheet Kwaliteitsafspraken

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**Datum**

18 april 2019

**Versie**

5.0

**Contactpersoon**

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### GEGEVENS INSTELLING

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| • Naam instelling              | Maastricht University                         |
| • BRIN                         | 21PJ  |
| • Bezoekadres                  | Minderbroedersberg 4-6, 6211 LK<br>Maastricht |
| • Kwaliteitsafspraken          | Trail in ITK                                  |
| • Inleverdatum aanvraagdossier | maandag 10 september 2018                     |

### STATUS DOSSIER

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| • Datum ontvangst aanvraagdossier              | vrijdag 31 augustus 2018  |
| • Bezoekdag                                    | vrijdag 26 oktober 2018   |
| • Adviesrapport (voor feitelijke onjuistheden) | donderdag 17 januari 2019 |
| • Advies Dagelijks Bestuur NVAO                | maandag 4 maart 2019      |
| • Advies toegestuurd aan Minister van OCW      | woensdag 6 maart 2019     |
| • Beschikkingsdatum                            | woensdag 1 mei 2019       |

## PANELSAMENSTELLING

- |                            |                       |   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| • <b>Voorzitter</b>        | Janke Cohen-Schotanus | Em. prof. dr. Janke Cohen-Schotanus is momenteel hoogleraar en Hoofd Centrum Innovatie en Onderzoek Medisch Onderwijs bij de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Zij doet veel onderzoek naar effectieve toetsing.   |
| • <b>Lid</b>               | Agneta Bladh          | Dr. Agnetha Bladh is zelfstandig consultant op het gebied van onderwijs en onderzoek. Ze is gepromoveerd in Politieke Wetenschappen en was voorzitter van de Zweedse wetenschappelijke onderzoekssraad. Voorheen was zij rector van de Universiteit van Kalmar. Daarvoor was ze staatssecretaris van Onderwijs. Zij is politiek actief (sociaal democraat) en heeft een lange staat van dienst in diverse hoger onderwijsinstellingen waarin zij veel onderzoek heeft verricht. |
| • <b>Lid</b>               | Jan Zuidam            | Drs. Jan Zuidam studeerde chemie en was vice voorzitter RvB bij DSM. Heeft momenteel diverse bestuursfuncties bij o.a. VNCI (Vereniging Nederlandse Chemie Industrie).  |
| • <b>Lid</b>               | Jeroen Huisman        | Prof. dr. Jeroen Huisman is hoogleraar Higher Education at CHEGG Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent.  |
| • <b>Student-lid</b>       | Lara Schu             | Lara Schu BSc studeert Computer Science aan de Technical University of Kaiserslautern in Duitsland. Ze is student-assistente, onderzoeksassistente en onderwijsassistente geweest en heeft een actieve rol vervuld in studentenvakbonden en universiteitsraden.   |
| • <b>Procescoördinator</b> | Frank Wamelink        |   |
| • <b>Secretaris</b>        | Mark Delmartino       |   |