

## NVAO GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF FINAL PROJECTS DURING EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

### *Introduction*

Assessing final projects is one of the components of a panel assessment of the learning outcomes achieved; standard 4 (limited programme assessment) or standard 11 (extensive programme assessment) of the revised accreditation framework<sup>1</sup>. These guidelines comprise several instructions to ensure that the panels conduct this assessment in a consistent and thorough manner. At the same time, the instructions are intended to leave sufficient space for the panels to adapt their assessment to the features of the programme, on the basis of their expertise and with the application of the framework and the explanatory notes contained in it.

Firstly, the assessment of final projects is an important test that makes it possible to verify whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Secondly, the assessment of final projects provides insight into the manner in which the programme safeguards the exit level as well as the overall substantive quality of the programme.

Rather than conducting a substantive reassessment, the panel is requested to provide a well-reasoned judgement as to whether the programme is applying its own points of departure appropriately: does the final project or do the aggregate projects submitted demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes were achieved? NVAO requests the panels to assess the safeguarding of the required exit level and, if doubtful, to conduct a further study. Further study is called for if the panel encounters final projects that have been judged in error as satisfactory.

### *Standard: Achieved level*

This standard reads: “*The level achieved is demonstrated by interim and final tests, final projects and the performance of graduates in actual practice or in post-graduate programmes*”. With respect to this standard, a number of aspects are weighted in order to arrive at a judgement. The panel weighs its findings regarding each of these aspects in the substantiation of its judgement. Any conclusion by the panel that final projects have been judged in error as satisfactory is taken seriously by NVAO and considered as constituting a reason for further study.

### *Various types of final projects*

In many cases, the final thesis constitutes the end-of-course test of a programme. In addition to, or in some cases in lieu of, the final thesis final projects may involve an interim exam, a portfolio, a professional product, an article, a creative performance or a combination of the above. The programme describes how it tests whether the exit level is achieved. In principle, the panel follows the programme in its choice of the products or “range of final achievements” to be assessed.

### *Selection of final projects*

The programme will provide the panel with a full list of graduates for the last two completed academic years. This list should, as a minimum, contain: the student numbers, descriptions of the final projects, the graduation dates, the modes of study, the locations of the programmes, and the results achieved in the final study phase (for example, the assessment mark given for final project(s), the mark for oral defence, and the final graduation mark).

The panel will select a minimum of 15 final projects from this list. In order to gain a proper picture of the standards that the programme uses to safeguard its exit level, final projects are selected with a score of barely satisfactory to satisfactory (5.5 – 6.9), very satisfactory to good (7.0 – 8.4) and excellent (8.5 or higher). The panel ensures that the distribution over these categories is more or less proportional to the distribution of marks in the entire list. In addition, the sampling is composed such that all locations and modes of study are sufficiently represented to warrant a judgement. If necessary, the panel will expand its sampling.

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<sup>1</sup> Government Gazette dated 19 December 2014, no. 36791

### *Scheduling*

The panel assesses the final projects prior to its site visit. In its scheduling, the panel needs to consider the number of steps involved in the procedure: forwarding of a comprehensive list, selection by the panel, forwarding of the sampling of the programme, forwarding of final projects to the panel secretary, distribution among the panel members, first and possibly additional assessments. For this reason, timely contact between the panel secretary and the programme is important.

### *Assessment criteria and assessment form*

The panel bases its assessment on the criteria the programme uses for its assessment of the final projects. If the panel does not consider these criteria adequate, it will explain so to the programme, illustrate its findings in its report and assess the final projects on the basis of the adapted criteria. In its assessment the panel takes into consideration the assessment forms completed and signed for each final project.

### *Panel judgement*

The panel distributes the selection of final projects among the panel members. Each panel member assesses the assigned final projects prior to the site visit. Should any doubt arise as to whether the programme was justified in assessing the final project as satisfactory, the project is additionally assessed by a second panel member (second opinion). Student members may be involved in the assessment, but in such cases the final project will also be assessed by another panel member.

### *Additional study if safeguarding of exit level is questioned*

In the event that the panel entertains serious doubt with respect to more than 10% of the final projects assessed as to whether they are up to standard, it will expand its first sampling. As this expansion of the number of final projects studied is aimed at determining whether the programme is applying the cut-off score correctly, it would seem logical for the panel first to select final projects which score on the borderline of satisfactory and unsatisfactory. Some spread in the marks is necessary, however, in order to avoid "tunnel vision". The panel substantiates its methods in its assessment report.

### *Site visit*

During the site visit, the panel meets with assessors/examiners of the programme in order to gain a clear insight into the manner by which they arrived at their judgement.

### *Report on unsatisfactory/satisfactory judgement*

Subsequent to the meetings held during the site visit, the panel will formulate a weighted final judgement on the exit level achieved, taking into consideration the information obtained during the meeting with the assessors/examiners. If a panel finds that the programme has erroneously assessed final projects as satisfactory, it will state so in its assessment report, with a substantiation of its judgement (Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Good or Excellent) of the level achieved by the programme. In its substantiation, the panel takes into consideration its general impression of the level of testing by the programme and the performance level of the graduates in actual practice and, if applicable, post-graduate programmes.

### *Numbers*

If the number of graduates in the last two academic years totals fewer than 30, the panel will request a list containing the last 30 graduates or, if the total number of graduates is fewer than 30, a list of all graduates. The latter may involve, for example, Research Master's programmes, which are usually small-scale. Apart from this, the above provisions apply.

### *Clusters and combinations of Bachelor's and Master's programmes*

External assessment can consist of the assessment of several (small) programmes at the same time, such as the teacher-training programmes in professional higher education (HBO) and academic higher education (WO) or a number of Bachelor's and Master's programmes in academic higher education (WO) within a single discipline. In such cases, the panel can expand the size of the selection, at its own discretion, from 15 final projects to a size that enables the panel to come to an adequate assessment of the level achieved by each individual programme.



For each programme (CROHO number), the panel should, in any case, assess four final projects. In exceptional situations, NVAO may be consulted.

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