Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance

(Dutch: ERGO – Eigen Regie in Gents Onderwijsbeleid en Kwaliteitszorg)

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**List of acronyms and abbreviations**

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>NVAO</td>
<td>Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders</td>
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<td>Ba</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOWA</td>
<td>Department of Educational Policy</td>
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<td>EQCU</td>
<td>Educational Quality Control Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCI</td>
<td>Faculty Committee for Internationalisation</td>
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<td>Ma</td>
<td>Master</td>
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<tr>
<td>ManaMa</td>
<td>Master after Master, a Master programme following a Master-after-Bachelor programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDCA cycle</td>
<td>Plan-Do-Check-Act-cycle</td>
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<td>ERGO</td>
<td>Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>UGent</td>
<td>Ghent University</td>
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<td>UIP</td>
<td>UGent Integrated Policy Information System</td>
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1. Introduction and principles

As a result of the amendment decree which suspends the external quality assessments and replaces them with the institutional review, Ghent University has developed a system of self-managing educational policy and quality assurance. In this system, existing structures and processes are supplemented with some new elements, namely peer learning visits, the Educational Quality Commission, the faculty and programme portfolio and the educational quality manual.

The focus of self-management is still on the programmes, as was the case with the external quality assessments. Central administration aims to get a clear picture of the quality of each of the institution’s programmes and curricula. In doing so, Ghent University will not restrict itself to the programmes that have been accredited in the previous system, but will monitor the quality of all offered programmes, including postgraduate, linking and preparatory programmes. Moreover, self-management will also comprise programmes visited by an external body of accreditation.

The following principles are the basis of the internal quality assurance Ghent University applies to monitor the quality of its programmes. To a large extent, they reflect the basis on which educational quality assurance has functioned in the past years. However, some significant new points of focus are developed as a consequence of the abolishment of external quality assessments and Ghent University’s development of complete self-management of educational quality assurance. The principles are:

- **Quality assurance as a joint project.** Quality Assurance is a shared responsibility between the departments, the faculty and central administration. The aim is to maximize cooperation between all parties concerned and create a balance between centralized and decentralized initiatives.

- **Targeted improvement instead of assessment.** The external assessment panels have almost always demonstrated that there was a basis of quality. Therefore, internal quality assurance should primarily focus on the continuous improvement of that existing quality. In order to monitor improvement, a form of assessment remains necessary. Central administration will determine both the order and timing of this quality control, based on the information at its disposal.

- **Educational policy and quality assurance are inextricably linked.** The faculties and departments are expected to integratedly implement the six strategic objectives set by Ghent University and the accompanying processes. Faculties and departments select which actions they will take and which policy they will pursue to best match the programme’s quality assurance (sixth strategic objective) with multiperspectivism, research-based education, focus on students’ and lecturers’ talents, the involvement of stakeholders, and internationalisation (strategic objectives 1 to 5).

- **Greater focus on continuous quality assurance.** The externally induced assessment stress is replaced by a permanent focus on improvement of the programmes’ quality. The Study Programme Committees and Educational Quality Control Units (EQCU) must – in their respective functions – apply the quality improvement cycle (PDCA cycle) to different processes on different levels, with particular attention to the final stage. The results of interventions are monitored and evaluated. The extent to which the committees and units contribute to permanent quality assurance is monitored by central administration.

- **Involvement of external parties.** Each programme must demonstrate that it requests feedback from the field of practice (fourth strategic objective). This feedback process is already taking place, but will be monitored more closely. At the new two central structures, which replace the external quality assessments, external experts are also involved in the assessment, namely the external content expert at peer learning visits, and the profit and non-profit external experts in the Educational Quality Commission.

- **Data driven.** Comparative tools are used to ensure that comparable data are generated over faculties and programmes. Faculties and programmes must be able to monitor and evaluate themselves, and central administration must be able to identify bottlenecks based on data, in order to monitor the programmes in a targeted fashion. There will be open communication on the comparative programme information the institution disposes of.

- **Large input from students.** Because of the participative management culture at Ghent University, much importance is given to the input of students in educational quality assurance. Their input is guaranteed by both systematic surveys and active participation at every stage of quality assurance.
2. The PDCA cycle on three levels

SMGE maintains the current models in which the PDCA cycle is implemented at Ghent University on three levels: (1) the programme, (2) the faculty and (3) the institution/central administration. If new monitoring elements are necessary and desirable because of the abolishment of external quality assessments, these are added by SMGE (see Figure 1).

2.1. The educational level

On the educational level, the Study Programme Committee remains the most important body for educational policy and quality assurance. The tasks of the Study Programme Committee and its chair can be found in the educational quality manual.

The Study Programme Committee provides the vision and policy (PLAN) with regard to the strategic objectives. The sixth strategic objective “quality assurance” takes a central place in the Study Programme Committee and is operationalized in (1) the vision and educational competences of the programme (singularity/profiling, competency model, benchmarking, communication), (2) the curriculum (competence matrix, modules, teaching methods, master’s thesis, internship), (3) testing (view and policy on testing, educational attainment), (4) the processes for continuous quality assurance, and (5) communication.

The Study Programme Committee is also responsible for policy implementation (DO) and ensures that the six strategic objectives are translated into processes and actions in the programme. Central administration provides processes for the six strategic objectives expected from the programme. An example of such a process is: “The programme pursues a transparent and efficient policy regarding master’s theses, in order to provide each student with the best chance to complete a high-quality master’s thesis and, in doing so, rely on adequate supervision (selection process, feedback, creativity, documents, criteria, evaluation, defence, level, possibility to publish...).” To implement these processes, the programme can choose different actions to take. An overview of these processes and actions can be found in the educational quality manual, which can serve as a source of inspiration. The Study Programme Committee makes a case for which actions are selected and which not, and takes the selected actions.

In order to determine whether these actions and processes also lead to the desired results, it is important to continuously monitor results (CHECK). To carry out this monitoring process, the Study Programme Committee has tools at its disposal, which provide 360° feedback on the educational quality of the programme. For several years, centrally organized student evaluations have been carried out (teaching evaluations, curriculum evaluations, measuring of study time). Recently, a lecturer survey has been launched, the results of which will be integrated in the next years in the lecturer portfolio. The consultations with the work field and the alumni surveys provide monitoring by external stakeholders. The programme can also take its own assessment initiatives, such as additional surveys of focus groups. Finally, an important source of information is the Educational Administration and Student Information System (OASIS). Programmes can use OASIS to generate quantitative data about learning paths, efficiency, teaching methods, testing, etc. These data include results and indicators which can serve as a basis for policy choices. The use of OASIS for policy purposes is, however, technically complex. Moreover, there was a need to link OASIS data to other existing databanks. These two factors have led to the creation of the Ghent University Integrated Policy Information System in 2015. Because the system generates policy information on three levels (programme, faculty, and central), its importance as a monitoring tool for the programmes will only increase in the coming years.

Figure 1. Policy-making and -implementation and relation to quality assurance systems
The data obtained from these monitoring systems are the visible results of the policy pursued within the programme. Therefore, they can be considered as quality indicators. Ghent University distinguishes three types of such indicators. First, there are the hard quality indicators to be met by each programme. An example is: ‘The programme’s curriculum has a logical coherence’. These hard quality indicators have always taken a central place within the institution’s educational policy and quality assurance, since they are closely related to the standards that were set by the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders in external quality assessments.

Second, there are the university-wide quality indicators, in which Ghent University sets a global objective for itself across faculties and programmes. An example is ‘By 2020, 25% of the students must have international mobility’. The programme can set its own target percentage and provide arguments for doing so. These university-wide quality indicators are relatively new: they were drafted in 2015 in mutual consultation with programmes, faculties and central administration and set out the guidelines for the next five years.

Third, there are the programme-specific quality indicators, related to the actions selected by the programme which allow processes to run adequately. These indicators can be set and substantiated by the programme itself. In doing so, the programme predefined its own objectives. All these results/quality indicators are diverse and they each contribute to the image of the degree to which the policy, processes and actions lead to the desired result. The programme selects which results will be targeted more or less strongly by selecting actions and quality indicators.

The monitoring of the results and the quality indicators (CHECK) happens both internally (by the programme itself = self-assessment) and at central level (by the central administration). The programme’s self-assessment or the internal CHECK is a continuous process. The Study Programme Committee is constantly reflecting on the predefined objectives, sets these against the results from the various sources described above, and takes actions for improvement (see ACT-phase). Until recently, this process of self-assessment was reviewed under the system of the external quality assessments, which constituted the external quality CHECK. This external assessment is now, in SMGE, replaced by the peer learning visit. Peer learning visits can be regarded as internal quality assessments, or rather ‘visits’, in which a team of three chairs of Study Programme Committees from other Ghent University Programmes, along with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Department of Educational Policy (DEP, secretary) visit the programme and give their opinion on the vision, policy, policy implementation, monitoring and improvement policy. Peer learning visits have a periodic character. The frequency of the visits will differ from programme to programme, but on average, peers will visit each programme every six years. More detailed information can be found in part three.

Based on self-assessment and monitoring, the programme makes plans for the improvement policy (ACT). The ACT phase is essentially a phase of reflection, not only on deficiencies and malfunctions, but also on processes which run well and must be retained in the future. The programme encourages the continuation of good practices and takes initiatives to remedy weak results. This improvement policy is nurtured by the evaluations of students, lecturers, alumni, the work field, internship mentors, and master’s theses’ supervisors. The Study Programme Committee also builds on quantitative data from OASIS and UGI and on the peer learning visit reports and the Annual Quality Meeting (see below). This improvement policy is closely monitored and gives rise to revaluation, so that the effectiveness of the measures taken are quickly visible and, if required, additional actions can be taken.

As indicated above, an educational quality manual has been drafted, which in the first place offers programmes a framework to select actions in function of the processes required within the strategic objectives. In addition, it provides a range of possibilities to attain the quality indicators. The Educational Council decided in 2015 to develop a programme portfolio for each programme, which gave the programmes the opportunity to closely monitor their processes and accompanying actions and quality indicators related to educational policy and quality assurance, as well as to allow for central monitoring. This portfolio will be made available via the Ghent University platform Minerva. It comprises all the programme’s processes, actions, procedures and practices related to the six strategic objectives, with a specific focus on the sixth objective “quality assurance”. In the portfolio, the programme concretely illustrates how it deals with educational policy and continuous quality assurance. Therefore, documents are not deleted or replaced, but new documents or sections are added to create an integrated entity which embodies the programme’s ‘history’. The portfolio’s folder structure very explicitly follows the PDCA-cycle. This implies that in each section vision and policy (P), policy implementation (D), monitoring (C), and reflection and improvement policy (A) are expected to be specified. By systematically following the PDCA-cycle, a continuous quality assurance and quality culture can be attained.
2.2. The faculty level

At Faculty level, the most important bodies for educational policy and quality assurance remain the Educational Quality Control Unit (EQCU), chaired by the director of studies, together with the Faculty Council, chaired by the dean. The EQCU is usually composed of the chairs of the faculty’s Study Programme Committees, along with delegations from the other echelons, allowing education providers and education users to be united at faculty level in the EQCU. The Faculty Council is more widely composed, and does not only determine educational policy, but also the policy on research, staff, facilities, etc. The tasks of the EQCU and director of studies can be found in the quality manual.

The EQCU and Faculty Council determine the vision and policy (PLAN) with regard to the first five strategic objectives as far as these concern global processes across all the faculty’s programmes. In this matter, the EQCU is the Faculty Council’s advisory body. This advice concerns faculty-wide processes, for example concerning scientific integrity, student counselling and learning track counselling, and the professionalisation of lecturers. In addition, the EQCU also plays an important role in the sixth strategic objective, with regard to quality of the programme. More specifically, the EQCU advises the Faculty Council about the generic processes related to testing policy, master’s theses, benchmarking, continuous quality assurance, communication and information. Specifically with regard to internationalisation, each faculty has a Faculty Committee for Internationalisation (FCI), which outlines the faculty’s internationalisation policy and gives recommendations in this matter to the Faculty Council.

Since 2015, faculties have been asked to write down both the pursued and envisaged policy in a faculty educational policy plan, which, in addition to the educational policy related to the six strategic objectives, also comprises the specific plans for the future. This faculty educational policy plan is the basis for the faculty integrated policy plan, which also includes research, services, and staff policy. In the context of the policy cycle, the Board of Governors uses the faculties’ integrated policy plans as a basis to annually decide on the content of the plans and related resources.

Policy implementation (DO) at faculty level is situated at the Faculty Office of Education Services. The Faculty Office of Education Services has a facilitating and logistical function for faculty- and programme-specific councils and committees involved in education. The faculty provides an adequate policy of the Faculty Office of Education Services, and sufficient staff for the efficient execution of tasks within the four clusters (student administration, quality assurance, course availability, and monitoring service). At faculty level, the processes and actions are executed which are required to achieve the six strategic objectives. An example of such a process at faculty level is: “When there are vacancies for professorial staff, the faculty pursues a policy in which the presence of educational competencies is sufficiently guaranteed (e.g. by teaching a trial session, vision statement education, programme portfolio, taking account of experience and evaluations...). When evaluating the candidates, both these educational competences and the research competences are taken into consideration in the assessment”.

In order to determine whether these actions and processes at faculty level also lead to the desired results, various sources of monitoring are used (CHECK). At faculty level, the most important elements are lecturer surveys, the own faculty-level assessment initiatives, the Policy Information System (UGI), and in some faculties, the wide advisory council with external stakeholders. Indeed, the Policy Information System also generates information at faculty level. These results of the pursued policy are, also at faculty level, set against the hard university-wide and faculty-specific quality indicators, similar to what happens at programme level.

All processes, actions, procedures, and practices are commented on by the faculty in the faculty portfolio, which mainly focuses on the first five strategic objectives. In the faculty portfolio, the faculty concretely illustrates how educational policy and continuous quality assurance are dealt with on faculty level. Again, the folder structure very explicitly follows the PDCA-cycle, which guarantees a sufficient focus on all phases in the cycle. This implies that in each section the faculty specifies vision and policy (P), policy implementation (D), monitoring (C), and reflection and improvement policy (A). By systematically following the PDCA-cycle, a continuous quality assurance and quality culture can be attained.

Also at faculty level, there is a process of self-assessment, in which selected actions and processes and the consequent results are measured against the objectives set in the quality indicators. In addition to this self-assessment, an internal system of quality control by the central administration has existed since 2013: the Annual Quality Meeting between the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA) and each faculty. The Quality Meeting was established by the Board of Governors on May 2012 as a first step in the reform of internal quality assurance, in preparation of the institutional reviews. At that time, the abolishment of external quality assessments was not yet under discussion, and the Quality Meeting was intended to complement external quality assessments. Therefore, the Annual Quality Meeting has, already for some years, been an important part of Ghent University’s quality model and has been
the cornerstone of the internal quality assurance in combination with the external quality assessments.

The Quality Meeting is attended by, on the one hand, the dean and the faculty director of studies, and, on the other hand, the director of educational policy, the head of office of educational quality assurance and their direct executives. A few days in advance, there is a meeting between a delegation of students and the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA). The order of the Quality Meetings is fixed, spread out throughout the year, which allows faculties to know well in advance when to expect the Quality Meeting visit.

During the Quality Meeting, the manner in which the faculty and the programmes embody the six strategic educational objectives is systematically verified. The results/quality indicators are checked on both levels. The information from the various sources of monitoring, from the faculty portfolio and the programme portfolios, and from the faculty educational policy plans play an important role in this context.

Moreover, the Quality Meeting considers the manner in which the faculty and the programmes have responded to the recommendations of the periodic peer learning visits and of the previous Quality Meeting. This way, the faculty gets the opportunity to give an annual report of the efforts made by the programmes during the period between the peer learning visits. Although the Annual Quality Meeting is situated at faculty level, it principally also takes all faculty programmes in consideration. Based on the principle of differentiated monitoring, this will be done more systematically and more explicitly for some programmes than for others.

The meeting takes place in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, in order to allow a discussion of both the strengths and possible weaknesses of the programme without any restraint. For programmes which pursue a good quality policy, as evidenced by the portfolio and the peer learning visit report, the follow-up strategy implies a rather marginal testing. For some programmes, the dean, the director of studies and the Department of Educational Policy will indicate the elements for which the programme underperforms or remains to underperform, and whose quality could improve. For a limited number of programmes, an even more pronounced intense counselling might be required and more frequent or additional quantitative or qualitative student or staff surveys could be conducted. The Quality Meeting report falls under the responsibility of the director of educational policy and is submitted to the Executive Board.

Based on the self-assessment in the faculty councils and committees (Educational Quality Control Unit (EQCU) and Faculty Council) and based on the interview and report of the Annual Quality Meeting, the faculty makes plans for an improvement policy (ACT). This policy plan contains actions which will be taken to remedy weaker results at faculty level and in consultation with the programmes. These improvement actions are also included in the faculty policy plans and are (possibly) linked to the provision of resources. The next Annual Quality Meeting will verify whether the faculty/programme has adequately followed up these elements of improvement. Since the Quality Meeting is organized annually, this is the shortest feedback loop within self-management between central administration and the faculties/programmes.

2.3. The central administration level

At central administration level, the Educational Council, chaired by the director of educational policy, is still the central administration’s (Board of Governors, Executive Board) official advisory body on education. As such, the Council plays a crucial role in formulating educational policy and securing educational quality. The Board of Governors has the final responsibility for strategic decisions, while the Executive Board (with delegation of powers by the Board of Governors) has the final responsibility for operational decisions.

The Educational Council formulates the vision and the policy (PLAN) regarding education at Ghent University. The Council drafts vision texts, the central policy documents, the strategic educational objectives, the processes expected from faculties and programmes, and the possible actions which can be taken to implement the educational objectives. Moreover, the Council stipulates the hard quality indicators, the university-wide quality indicators, and the possible faculty- and programme-specific quality indicators. It also determines the form and content of the resources for monitoring and evaluation: the student and lecturer surveys, the alumni surveys, the thematic quality reports, and the education-related part of the policy information system. The Council’s wide composition guarantees that its proposals are sufficiently supported before they are transferred for decision to the Board of Governors or the Executive Board.

The policy implementation (DO) at central administration level is mainly situated at the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA), which has already for many years played a central role in the implementation of policy actions, processes, practices and instruments. The four offices within DOWA (the Educational Quality Assurance Office, the Counselling Office, the Registrar's Office, and the International Relations Office) ensure the implementation of the processes which are fundamental to a structured and high-quality functioning of educational matters at Ghent University. Besides DOWA, the other seven Ghent University Departments also, to a higher or lesser extent, contribute to the implementation of educational policy and the assurance of educational quality: the Department of Student Facilities, the Department of Information and Communication Technology, the Department of
Infrastructure and Facility Management, the Research Department, the Department of Administrative Affairs, the Department of Personnel and Organization, the Financial Department, as well as the transversal director of Internationalisation.
More than with the faculties and programmes, the monitoring and evaluation (CHECK) at central level includes several layers. The sources of information are also at this level largely the same: the student and lecturer surveys, the alumni surveys, the thematic quality reports, the own evaluations of faculties and programmes and the UGent Integrated Policy Information System (UGI).

First, there is the self-assessment, or the CHECK which happens within the Educational Council. The various sources of information are continuously applied to evaluate policy and policy implementation. These results may show that actions are required for the entire university: adjustment of key objectives, a clearer vision, improved communication, better support, a different deployment of resources or more resources, a refinement of regulations, etc.

Second, central administration self-manages the evaluation of the implementation of educational policy and quality assurance in the entire institution. A first means to this end is the Annual Quality Meeting specifically aimed at faculties and their programmes. This was already discussed above and has been operational for several years. In 2015, two new, additional bodies were created because of the abolishment of the external quality assessments: the peer learning visits or the visits of the programmes as already mentioned above, and a new central body of educational quality assurance: the Educational Quality Commission. The Educational Quality Commission is a specialized body which systematically processes the collected information with regard to educational quality assurance (including the peer learning visit reports and the Annual Quality Meeting). This information is converted to a review of the quality of each programme and possibly in remedial actions or in proposals to raise concern about programmes or to abolish them (see below for a more detailed discussion).

Based on the CHECK within the Educational Council and based on the Annual Quality Meeting, the peer learning visits and the review of the Educational Quality Commission, proposals are made for the improvement policy (ACT). This improvement policy can be very specific (remediation trajectory of a lecturer) or very comprehensive (change of flexibilisation regulations for the entire university), and may have direct implications at various levels, such as for students (elimination of correction for guessing), staff (functional career path), resources (21 additional professorial staff members for education), course availability (English-spoken master programmes), etc.

2.4. Connection between the three levels

The three levels, namely programme, faculty and central administration, are interconnected. The lecturers in the programmes, or a representative delegation of them, are represented in the Study Programme Committee. The chairs of the Study Programme Committees are part of the Faculty Educational Quality Control Unit, which is led by the faculty director of studies. The eleven directors of studies are, on an institutional level, ex officio members of the Educational Council, chaired by the director of educational policy. Besides the Educational Council, the Educational Quality Commission also operates at institutional level. While the Educational Council mainly formulates the educational policy - which also indirectly affects quality assurance - it is mainly the Educational Quality Commission which ensures the internal “accreditation” of the programmes. Finally, also the Board of Governors and the Executive Board play, as the highest governing bodies of the university, an important role within the PDCA-cycle. They get information and advice from the Educational Council and the Educational Quality Commission for further monitoring and decision-making.
3. The peer learning visits and the Educational Quality Commission

As shown above, self-management at Ghent University comprises the integration of some new elements in the already long-standing system of educational policy and quality assurance. Below, there is an overview of the manner in which Ghent University has given an answer to the abolishment of external quality assessments.

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<td>Visit external assessment panel</td>
<td>Peer learning visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation Organization of the Methodology and Programme’s self-assessment report</td>
<td>Educational quality manual</td>
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<td>NVAO (external accreditation)</td>
<td>Educational Quality Commission (internal accreditation)</td>
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3.1. Peer learning visits

As denoted above, the peer learning visits can be situated within the CHECK phase at programme level. Peer learning visits can be seen as internal quality assessments, or rather visits, whereby a team of three Study Programme Committee chairs from other Ghent University programmes visits the programme for one day and reviews the vision, policy, policy implementation, monitoring, and improvement policy, based on the six strategic objectives. This team of three chairs is complemented with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA, secretary). Within the context of continuous quality assurance and quality culture, each programme keeps a programme portfolio and optimizes this portfolio based on the quality manual. This programme portfolio, along with the faculty portfolio, serves as a basis for the peer learning visit. It is developed within the reliable and protected Minerva platform and is intentionally electronic. By using wikis, the authors and visitors can quickly navigate through the different sections, can easily connect documents and wikipages with each other, can work together on documents, and can quickly make overviews (e.g. of all ACT phases) by using the labels.

The assessment framework (see appendix) consists of 10 dimensions, which are the operationalisations of the six strategic objectives. For each dimension, the peer learning visit team selects one of three assessment options: ‘point of concern’ (Does not meet the minimum assessment criteria. Actions of improvement required in the short term; if not, coercive measures will be imposed), ‘satisfactory’ (Largely meets the assessment criteria. The implementation measures/initiatives taken by the programme are considered to be sufficient), or ‘exemplary’ (The measures taken by the programme are considered excellent in all respects and can serve as an example). These 10 assessment dimensions are set against the quality features of Randers’ Quality Code 2015-2017, NVAO.

With the system of peer learning visits, Ghent University retains some important aspects of the previous system. (1) First, there is still a thorough assessment of educational quality assurance at programme level. (2) In addition, the critical constructive view of a team of experts remains important. (3) A third aspect involves the assessment of both the content of the programme and the educational basis, which cannot be separated from the processes of continuous quality assurance. (4) Moreover, the frequency is also retained, i.e. on average every six years. This period is long enough to guarantee the feasibility of the peer learning visit system with the available resources, and short enough to ensure quality monitoring in combination with the Annual Quality Meeting.

However, there are some points at which the peer learning visits differ from the external quality assessments. (1) First, they largely comprise colleagues who are working in similar circumstances and can therefore be considered as peers, which is extremely beneficial for understanding the context and framework in which they operate. Herein, however, also lies a potential threat. The visits may in fact be interpreted as cosy get-togethers with colleagues, disabling critical comments with regard to quality assurance. (2) In addition, the peer learning visits are interpreted as ‘learning’ visits, which shifts the focus from ‘evaluating’ to ‘mutual learning and improving’. They also aim to strengthen the cohesion between programmes across faculties, and to share each other’s good practices. Herein also lies a possible threat. A visiting team may, following the example of the external quality assessments, act as a mere evaluation body and thus make an open discussion difficult or impossible. (3) A third difference with the external quality assessments is that the peer learning visits not only focus on educational quality, but also on the implementation of the institution’s educational policy. This enables a more direct and integrated monitoring of the strategic objectives within the programmes. (4) Fourth, the burden of planning, which was traditionally associated with an external quality assessment/ accreditation, will be reduced over time. This reduction of burdens results from the use of the programme portfolio, which is linked to the faculty portfolio and is kept by the programmes as an instrument of continuous quality assurance. In preparation of a peer learning visit, the programmes are no longer required to draft a self-assessment report, but can submit their programme portfolio. (5) A fifth difference concerns the number of external members in a peer learning visit team. Now, there is only
one external member, namely the content expert with relation to the visited programme. If two or more external members were included, these peer learning visits would soon again evolve into external quality assessments rather than 'learning visits'. However, the question is whether one external member will prove to be sufficient to evaluate the content of the entire programme and whether this will not lead to a unilateral perspective. The concrete methodology of the peer learning visits is set out in a scenario drafted by DOWA. The peer learning visit provides feedback about the programme to the Educational Quality Commission.

3.2. The Educational Quality Commission

The Educational Quality Commission is charged with monitoring the quality assurance at Ghent University and with the development of practical proposals. It is the express intention for this body to shape and closely monitor quality assurance, and for it to have sufficient operational authority to take quality assurance decisions without prior submission to the Educational Council, the Board of Governors, or the Executive Board. The Educational Quality Commission is chaired by the (vice-)rector and also comprises the director of Educational Policy, four professorial staff members, one assistant academic staff member, and two external experts in the respective fields (one profit and one non-profit). The Educational Quality Assurance Office provides administration services. The members are primarily selected for their expertise or for their proven commitment to educational issues. They do not act as representatives of their division or faculty, but rather as monitoring and guiding body of the institution as a whole.

The Educational Quality Commission is a specialized body which systematically processes the collected information with regard to educational quality assurance (including the peer learning visits and the Annual Quality Meeting). This information is converted into reviews of the programme and remedial actions, and possibly in proposals to raise concern about programmes or to abolish them. With the establishment of the Educational Quality Commission, the institution has created a body which closes the cycle of quality improvement top-down. It is the body which supervises peer learning visits and the Quality Meeting and to which the reports of peer learning visits and the Quality Meeting are transferred for further action.

The tasks of the Educational Quality Commission include:
1. The (cyclic) discussion of the actual quality level of the faculties and/or programmes and the extent to which programmes and/or faculties take the necessary steps to ensure that quality.
2. Formulation of recommendations and possibly coercive measures for the adjustment of quality assurance.
3. Development of a framework for raising concern about programmes, the development of intensive adjustment trajectories when raising concern, of procedures for informing central administration of cases where concern is raised, of corrective procedures in such cases, and of procedures for advising the Board of Governors to amend programmes or abolish them.
4. Imposing conditions to programmes in order to prevent the need to raise concern (if the available information gives cause to this).
5. Drafting a schedule, which indicates the regularity of peer learning visits.
6. Composition of the teams which make the peer learning visits and selection of their chair.
7. Advising central administration on entirely external visits for certain programmes (as far as these are situated outside the context of external quality assessments).
8. Advising - on its own initiative or at express request - the Board of Directors and the Executive Board on matters concerning educational quality assurance. These advisory powers do not affect the advisory powers of other internal bodies regarding quality assurance (e.g. the Educational Council).

When assessing the programmes, the Educational Quality Commission uses the information derived from the various evaluation tools and from the programme and faculty portfolios. Important additional sources of information are the peer learning visits, which will take place over the next few years.

The advisory and decision-making powers of the Educational Quality Commission are limited to educational quality assurance. The Educational Quality Commission is essentially an operational body, which must be able to quickly and efficiently answer the requirements of contemporary quality assurance. Therefore, the Educational Quality Commission meets once a month. The Educational Quality Commission must be sufficiently embedded in the educational scene to be able to properly perform its duties. Thus, the Educational Quality Commission informs the Educational Council on decisions and appeals to the existing educational expertise in the Educational Council of faculties and programmes in carrying out its duties. The Educational Quality Commission is under the usual administrative supervision of the Board of Governors and the Executive Board, which it regularly reports to on matters of educational quality assurance. In these matters, it has extensive and independent advisory powers. For example, after a peer learning visit or a Quality Meeting, the recommendation could be given to submit a deficient programme to an external quality assessment. In extremis, the Educational Quality Commission can recommend to freeze or cancel a programme. The Educational Quality Commission’s review is transferred to the concerned programme and/or faculty. This review may contain points of improvement and a timeline to
realise these improvements. The Educational Quality Commission’s recommendations are also the basis for public reporting on the programmes, as required by the NVAO’s Quality Code.
### Appendix: Quality education at Ghent University: 10 evaluation dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of concern</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>NVAO Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not meet the minimum assessment criteria. Actions of improvement required in the short term; if not, coercive measures will be imposed.</td>
<td>Largely meets the assessment criteria. The implementation measures/initiatives taken by the programme are considered to be sufficient.</td>
<td>The measures taken by the programme are considered excellent in all respects and can serve as an example.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Dare to think & Multiperspectivism**
   - Critical sense, change of perspective, openness, pluralism and tolerance for dissenting views are central to education.
   - **Code**: 2

2. **Education based on excellent research**
   - Education is based on excellent research and recent scientific findings in the field.
   - **Code**: 1

3. **Talent development of students and lecturers**
   - Education gives students and lecturers the chance to maximally develop their talents and provides optimal information, guidance and challenges to this end.
   - **Code**: 3

4. **Involvement of stakeholders**
   - Students, lecturers, alumni and the field are actively involved in education, and participate in policy and assessment.
   - **Code**: 2

5. **Internationalisation**
   - Education provides students with maximum opportunities to acquire international/Intercultural competences. To this end, efforts are directed towards internationalisation projects, optimal student and staff mobility, Internationalisation@Home, and virtual mobility.
   - **Code**: 1

6. **Educational quality:**
   - **6.1. Vision and learning outcomes**
     - The programme has a clear vision and learning outcomes which are nationally and internationally relevant and reviewed, and meet the requirements of level, content and orientation.
     - **Code**: 1

   - **6.2. Curriculum and Constructive alignment**
     - The programme has a logically structured curriculum, and a good coordination between learning outcomes, curriculum, and teaching methods.
     - **Code**: 5

   - **6.3. Testing and final level**
     - The programme has a testing vision and testing policy, in line with the learning outcomes and the learning process.
     - **Code**: 6

   - **6.4. Processes for continuous quality assurance**
     - The programmes has a culture of continuous quality assurance and quality improvement.
     - **Code**: |

   - **6.5. Communication and information**
     - The programme optimally shares information and communicates with all concerned parties.
     - **Code**: 7

Code*: Measuring 10 evaluation dimensions against the quality features of Flanders’ Quality Code 2015-2017, NVAO.