



Ghent University's Quality Conduct

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

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations¹

AAP	Assistant Academic Staff (in Dutch: assisterend academisch personeel)
ATP	Administrative and Technical Staff (in Dutch: administratief en technisch personeel)
Ba	Bachelor
BoG	Board of Governors (in Dutch: Raad van Bestuur, RvB)
CKO	Faculty Quality Assurance Committee (in Dutch: Commissie Kwaliteitszorg Onderwijs)
DOWA	Education Department (Dutch: Directie Onderwijsaangelegenheden)
EB	Executive Board (in Dutch: Bestuurscollege)
EC	Education Council (in Dutch: Onderwijsraad, OR)
EQB	Education Quality Board (in Dutch: Onderwijskwaliteitsbureau, OKB)
ERGO	Ghent University's Quality Conduct (in Dutch: Eigen Regie in het Gentse Onderwijsbeleid)
FCI	Faculty Committee for Internationalization
FDO	Faculty Education Support Services (in Dutch: Facultaire Dienst Onderwijsondersteuning)
Ma	Master
ManaMa	Master-after-Master, an advanced Master's programme following a Master-after-Bachelor programme
NVAO	Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders
OASIS	Education Administration and Student Information System (in Dutch: OnderwijsAdministratie en StudentenInformatieSysteem)
PDCA cycle	Plan-Do-Check-Act-cycle
PC	Programme Committee (in Dutch: opleidingscommissie, OC)
UGent	Ghent University (Ghent Uni)
UGI	Ghent University's Integrated Business Intelligence System (in Dutch: UGent Geïntegreerd Beleidsinformatiesysteem)
ZAP	Professorial Staff (in Dutch: Zelfstandig Academisch Personeel)

¹ Please note that these abbreviations/acronyms mostly refer to Dutch designations or titles. Dutch equivalents are given between () where relevant.

1. Introduction and Principles

Legislative changes which suspended the external quality assessments and replaced them with the so-called "Institutional Review+", have given Ghent University the opportunity to develop an internal quality assurance conduct. In this system, existing structures and processes are supplemented with some new elements, namely **peer learning visits**, the **Education Quality Board**, faculty and study programme **portfolios** and a **quality manual for education**.

In the new quality conduct, the focus is still on study programmes, as was the case with the external quality reviews. At university level, we aim to get a clear picture of the quality of each of our study programmes and curricula. We will not restrict ourselves to previously accredited programmes, but will monitor the quality of all our study programmes, including postgraduate programmes, academic bridging programmes and preparatory programmes. Moreover, the quality conduct will also include in its monitoring study programmes reviewed by an external accreditation organization.

The following **principles** lie at the heart of our internal quality assurance system. To a large extent, these principles reflect our quality assurance processes of the past years. However, the suspension of external quality reviews and the development of our new quality conduct have allowed us to introduce a number of significant new elements. The principles are:

- **Quality assurance is a joint project.** More specifically, it is the shared responsibility of our study programmes, faculties and the university. Our aim is to maximize co-operation between all parties involved, and to create a balance between centralized and decentralized initiatives.
- **Targeted improvement instead of review.** In most cases, the external review panels revealed that there was a basis of quality. Therefore, internal quality assurance should focus primarily on a continuous improvement of existing quality. In order to monitor improvement, though, some form of review remains necessary. University management will determine both the order and timing of this quality review, based on the information it has at its disposal.
- **Education policy and quality assurance are inextricably linked.** We expect our faculties and study programmes to implement Ghent University's six strategic objectives and their corresponding processes in an integrated manner. They decide for themselves the policy they will pursue and the actions they will undertake to bring their quality assurance in alignment (i.e. strategic objective no. 6)

with the other strategic objectives (1-5): multiperspectivism, education based on excellent research, student and staff talent development, stakeholder involvement, and internationalization.

- **More focus on continuous quality assurance.** The periodic stress brought on by external reviews is replaced by permanent quality improvement. Programme Committees (PC) and Faculty Quality Commissions (CKO) must – in their respective functions – run the quality improvement cycle (PDCA cycle) involving the various processes on different levels, with particular attention to the final stage ('Act'). The results of interventions are monitored and reviewed. The extent to which the PC and CKO contribute to permanent quality assurance is monitored by university management.
- **Involvement of external parties.** Each study programme must demonstrate that it gathers feedback from the professional field (i.e. strategic objective no. 4). This feedback process takes place already, but will be monitored more closely. External experts are also involved in the two new elements we have introduced in our internal quality system and which replace external quality reviews, i.e. peer learning visits and the Education Quality Board (EQB). Peer learning visits involve an external content expert, and the EQB has among its members an external expert from the profit and non-profit sectors.
- **Data driven.** We use comparative tools to ensure that comparable data are generated across faculties and study programmes. Faculties and programmes must be able to engage in self-monitoring and self-assessment, and university management must be able to identify bottlenecks based on data, in order to monitor study programmes in a targeted fashion. There will be open communication on the comparative programme information we have at our disposal.
- **High student input.** In line with our participative management culture, we place great store by the input of students in quality assurance. We guarantee this input by means of systematic surveys as well as active participation at every stage of our quality assurance system.

2. The PDCA Cycle at Three Policy Levels

Ghent University's Quality Conduct consolidates the current models, in which the PDCA cycle is implemented at three policy levels: (1) the study programme, (2) the faculty and (3) the university. Wherever the suspension of external quality reviews has left (data) gaps, the Quality Conduct introduces new monitoring elements (see Figure 1).



▼ Figure 1. Policy-making and Policy Implementation and Relation to Quality Assurance Systems (in Dutch)

2.1. Study Programme Level

At study programme level, the **Programme Committee** remains the most important body for education policy and quality assurance. The Programme Committee's mandate, and that of its chair are listed in our quality manual for education.

The Programme Committee lays down the vision and policy (PLAN) with regard to the strategic objectives. The sixth strategic objective on "quality assurance" takes centre stage in the Programme Committee. It is operationalized in (1) the vision and programme competencies (unicity/profile, the competency model, benchmarking, communication), (2) the curriculum (competency matrix, learning pathways, teaching methods, Master's dissertation, work placement), (3) assessment (assessment vision and policy, exit level), (4) the processes for continuous quality assurance, and (5) communication.

The 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. At university level, we provide processes for the six strategic objectives which we expect study programmes to put into practice. An example of such a process is: *"The programme pursues a transparent and efficient policy regarding Master's dissertations, in order to provide each student with the best chance to complete a high-quality Master's dissertation and with adequate supervision (choice of topic, feedback, creativity, documents, criteria, assessment, defence, level, possibility to publish...)." To implement these processes, the programme can choose to take a variety of actions.*

An overview of these processes and actions can be found in the quality manual for education, which can serve as a source of inspiration. The Programme Committee makes a case for the actions it chooses to implement and which not, and implements them.

In order to determine whether these actions and processes also deliver the desired results, it is important to monitor them (CHECK) continuously. Programme Committees have tools at their disposal to carry out this monitoring, which taken together provide 360° feedback on the programme's education quality. For several years, we have organized **student surveys** at university level (course feedback, programme feedback, study time measurements). Recently, a **lecturers' survey** has been launched, the results of which will be integrated in the lecturer portfolio over the next couple of years. Consultations with the professional field and alumni surveys provide monitoring by **external stakeholders**. Study programmes can also take **assessment initiatives themselves**, such as additional surveys or focus group sessions. Finally, an important source of information is the Education Administration and Student Information System (in Dutch: OASIS). Study Programmes can use OASIS to generate quantitative data about learning paths, study progress, teaching methods, assessment, etc. These data include results and indicators which can serve as a basis for policy choices. Using OASIS for policy purposes, however, is a technically complex matter. Moreover, there was a clear need to link OASIS data to other existing databanks. These two factors led to the creation of **Ghent University' Integrated Business Intelligence System** in 2015.

Because the system generates business intelligence at our three policy levels (programme, faculty, and university), its importance as a monitoring tool for the programmes will only increase in the coming years.

The data obtained from these monitoring systems are the visible results of the policy a study programme pursues. As such, they can be considered as quality indicators. At Ghent University, we distinguish three types of indicators. First, there are the **hard quality indicators** which have to be met by each programme. An example is: *'The programme's curriculum has a logical coherence'*. These hard quality indicators have always taken centre stage in our university's education 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 reviews.

Second, there are the university-wide quality indicators, in which Ghent University sets a global objective for itself across faculties and study programmes. An example is *'By 2020, 25% of the students must have engaged in international mobility'*. Study programmes can set their own target and provide arguments for doing so. These **university-wide quality indicators** are relatively new: they were drafted in 2015 in mutual consultation with study programmes, faculties and university management, and set out the policy lines for the next five years.

Third, there are the **programme-specific quality indicators**, related to the actions selected by a study programme which allow processes to run adequately. These indicators can be set and substantiated by the study programme itself. As such, the programme predefines its own objectives.

Although these results/quality indicators are very diverse, they each contribute to image we have of the degree to which the policy, processes and actions lead to the desired result. By choosing specific actions and quality indicators, study programmes select which results they will target to a greater or lesser extent.

Monitoring the results and the quality indicators (CHECK) is an internal (by the programme itself = self-assessment) as well as an institutional responsibility (by university management). The programme's **self-assessment** or the internal CHECK is a continuous process. The Programme Committee reflects constantly on the predefined objectives, sets these against the results from the various sources described above, and takes improvement actions (see ACT-phase). Until recently, this self-assessment process was subject to the external quality reviews, which constituted an external quality CHECK. In the Quality Conduct 1.0, this external assessment has now been replaced by **peer learning visits**. These are internal quality reviews, or rather 'visits', in which a team of three Ghent University Programme Committee chairs visit another Ghent

University study programme, along with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA, secretary). The team then give their opinion on its vision, policy, policy implementation, monitoring and improvement policy. Peer learning visits have a periodic character. The frequency of the visits will differ from study programme to study programme, but on average, a team of peers will visit each study programme every six years. More detailed information can be found in part three.

Based on self-assessment and monitoring, the study programme draws up an improvement policy (ACT). The ACT phase is essentially a phase of reflection, not only on deficiencies and shortcomings, but also on processes which run well and must be retained in the future. The study programme promotes the continuation of *good practices* and takes initiatives to remedy weaknesses. This improvement policy is based on feedback obtained from students, lecturers, alumni, the professional field, work placement mentors, and Master's dissertation supervisors. The Programme Committee also builds on quantitative data from OASIS and UGI, on the reports from peer learning visits 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 become visible quickly and, if required, additional actions can be taken.

As indicated above, a **quality manual for education** has been drafted, which in the first place offers study programmes a framework from which to select actions according to the processes they must run to attain the strategic objectives. In addition, it provides a range of examples for attaining the quality indicators. In 2015, the Education Council decided to develop a **programme portfolio** for each study programme. This portfolio gives them the opportunity to monitor their processes and accompanying actions and quality indicators related to education policy and quality assurance closely. It also allows for central monitoring. It is made available through Ghent University's learning 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 of "quality assurance". In the portfolio, the programme specifically illustrates how it deals with education policy and continuous quality assurance. Therefore, existing documents are not deleted or replaced, but new documents or sections are added to create an integrated whole which embodies the programme's 'history'. The portfolio's folder structure very explicitly follows the **PDCA cycle**. This implies that each folder contains a vision and policy section (P), a policy implementation section (D), a monitoring section (C), and a reflection and improvement policy section (A). By systematically following the PDCA-cycle, a continuous quality assurance and quality culture can be attained.

2.2. Faculty Level

At faculty level, the most important bodies for education policy and quality assurance remain the **Faculty Quality Assurance Committee** (in Dutch: CKO), chaired by the Director of Studies, together with the **Faculty Council**, chaired by the Dean. The CKO is usually composed of the chairs of the faculty's Programme Committees, along with delegations from the other (staff) sections, allowing education providers and education users to be united at faculty level. The Faculty Council is more widely composed, and does not only lay down education policy, but also research policy, HR policy, facility management, etc. The responsibilities of the CKO and the Director of Studies can be found in the quality manual.

The CKO and Faculty Council lay down 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 study programmes. In these matters, the CKO serves as the Faculty Council's advisory body. This advice concerns faculty-wide processes, for example concerning academic/scientific integrity, student counselling and learning track counselling, and the professional development of lecturers. In addition, the CKO also plays an important role in the sixth strategic objective, with regard to quality of the study programme. More specifically, the CKO advises the Faculty Council about the generic processes related to assessment policy, Master's dissertations, benchmarking, continuous quality assurance, communication and information. Specifically with regard to internationalization, each faculty has a **Faculty Committee for Internationalization (FCI)**, which outlines the faculty's internationalization policy and gives recommendations in this matter to the Faculty Council.

Since 2015, faculties have to write a **policy plan** for education, containing their current policy as well as specific policy plans for the future, all in relation to the six strategic objectives. This policy plan for education is the foundation for the faculty's integrated policy plan, which also includes research, services, and HR policy. As part of our **policy cycle**, the Board of Governors takes annual decisions on the content of these integrated policy plans, and any related resources.

Policy implementation (DO) at faculty level is the responsibility of the Faculty Education Support Services (in Dutch: FDO). Their role is vis-à-vis the faculty- and programme-specific education-related councils and committees is a facilitating and logistical one. The faculty outlines an adequate policy for the FDO and provides sufficient staff so that its four clusters (student administration, quality assurance, curriculum

management, and tutorial services) can perform their tasks efficiently. The faculty runs processes and takes appropriate actions to achieve the six strategic objectives. An example of such a process at faculty level is: *"In case of vacancies for professorial staff, the faculty pursues a policy in which they can guarantee the candidates' didactic competencies (e.g. by holding trial lectures, asking for a vision statement on education, didactic portfolio, taking into account prior experience and assessments...). In a candidate's assessment, their didactic as well as their research competencies are taken into consideration"*.

In order to determine whether the actions and processes at faculty level yield the desired results, various monitoring sources are used (**CHECK**). At faculty level, the most important elements are **lecturers' surveys**, the faculty's own **assessment initiatives**, the information generated by our **Business Intelligence System** (UGI), and in some faculties, the advisory council of **external stakeholders**. The results of this CHECK are set against the hard university-wide and faculty-specific quality indicators, similar to the process at programme level.

The faculty describes all processes, actions, procedures, and practices in the **faculty portfolio**, which focuses mainly on the first five strategic objectives. In the faculty portfolio, the faculty illustrates specifically how they implement education policy and continuous quality assurance. Again, the portfolio's folder structure very explicitly follows the **PDCA cycle**, which guarantees a sufficient focus on all phases in the cycle. This implies that each folder contains a vision and policy section (P), a policy implementation section (D), a monitoring section (C), and a reflection and improvement policy section (A). Running the PDCA-cycle systematically is the way to attain a continuous quality assurance and quality culture.

A process of **self-assessment**, then, also takes place at faculty level, in which selected actions and processes and their results are measured against the objectives set in the quality indicators. In addition to this self-assessment, there is an additional internal quality assurance tool at faculty level. The Annual Quality Meeting between the Education Department and each faculty has been taking place since 2013. It was established by the Board of Governors in May 2012 as a first step in reforming our internal quality assurance in the run-up to the institutional review. At the time of its inception, there were no indications yet that external quality reviews would be suspended. In other words, the Quality Meeting came into being as an addition to the existing external quality reviews. At this point, it is – and has been for some years now – a valued part, if not a cornerstone of our internal quality assurance system, in combination with the external quality assessments.

The Annual Quality Meeting takes place between, on the one hand, the Dean and the Director of Studies, and, on the other hand, the Director of Education, the head of the Quality Assurance Office and their staff. A few days in advance, there is a meeting between a delegation of students and the Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA). The Quality Meetings take place throughout the academic year according to a fixed calendar. That way, faculties know well in advance when to expect their next Quality Meeting.

One of the aims of the Quality Meeting is to verify systematically the manner in which the faculty and study programmes realize Ghent University's six strategic education objectives. The results/quality indicators are checked on both levels. The information from the various monitoring tools, from the faculty and the study programme portfolio(s), and from the faculty policy plans for education play an important role in this context.

In addition, the Quality Meeting considers the manner in which the faculty and study programmes have responded to recommendations made during the periodic peer learning visits, and/or previous Quality Meetings. This way, the faculty can give an annual report of the efforts made by its study programmes in the interval between peer learning visits. Although the Annual Quality Meeting is situated at faculty level, it also covers all the faculty's study programmes. Based on the principle of differentiated monitoring, this will be done more systematically and more explicitly for some study programmes than for others.

The meeting takes place in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, in order to allow for a frank discussion of both the strengths and possible weaknesses of study programmes. Study programmes with a sound quality policy, as evidenced by their portfolio and their peer learning visit report, undergo only a marginal review by way of follow-up strategy. Some study programmes may be subject to a closer look by the Dean, the Director of Studies and DOWA, who will then identify the elements for which the study programme (continues to) underperform(s). A limited number of study programmes might require an even more pronounced and intense counselling, as well as 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 Education and is submitted to the Executive Board.

Based on the self-assessment in the faculty councils and committees (Faculty Committee for Quality Assurance and Faculty Council), and based on the Annual Quality Meeting (interview and report), the faculty draws up an improvement policy (ACT) in consultation with the study programmes. This policy plan contains remedial actions at faculty level, which are also included in the faculty policy plans, and which can be linked to the provision of resources. The next Annual Quality Meeting will verify

whether the faculty/programme has followed up on these improvement actions adequately. Since the Quality Meeting is organized annually, this is the shortest feedback loop between our faculties/study programmes and university management in our Quality Conduct.

2.3. University Level

At university level, the **Education Council**, chaired by the Director of Education, continues as Ghent University's official advisory body on education-related matters vis-à-vis the Board of Governors and the Executive Board. As such, it plays a crucial role in formulating education policy and monitoring quality of education. 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 Education Council formulates Ghent University's vision and policy (PLAN) on education. It drafts vision texts and university policy documents, lays down the strategic education objectives and processes expected of faculties and study programmes, and possible actions to take for the implementation of the education objectives. Moreover, the Council stipulates the hard quality indicators, the university-wide quality indicators, and possible faculty- and programme-specific quality indicators. It also determines the form and content of monitoring and assessment tools: student and lecturers' surveys, alumni surveys, specific quality reports, and the education-related part of our business intelligence system. The Council's broad composition guarantees that its proposals are sufficiently endorsed before they are submitted for ratification to the Board of Governors or the Executive Board.

Policy implementation (DO) at university level is mainly the responsibility of the Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA), which has played a central role in the implementation of policy actions, processes, practices and instruments for several years now. Its four offices (the 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 performance on education-related matters at Ghent University. Besides DOWA, the other seven Departments also, to a higher or lesser extent, contribute to the implementation of education policy and quality assurance: the Student Facilities Department, the Information and Communication Technology Department, the Infrastructure and Facility Management Department, the Research Department, the Administrative Affairs Department, the Personnel and Organization Department, and the Financial Department, as well as the transversal Director of Internationalization.

More so than at faculty and study programme level, the monitoring and review (CHECK) at central level consists of several layers, although the information sources are largely the same: student and lecturers' surveys, alumni surveys, specific quality reports, faculties' and study programmes' own tools, and Ghent University's Integrated Business Intelligence System (UGI).

A first element is the **self-assessment**, or the CHECK, which happens within the Education Council. The various information sources are consulted continuously to review policy and policy implementation. These results may reveal that certain actions are required for the entire university: adjustment of key objectives, a clearer vision, improved communication, better support services, more funds or a reallocation of funds, developing certain regulations further, etc.

Second, the Quality Conduct at university level monitors education policy and quality assurance and its implementation for the entire university. A first means to this end is the **Annual Quality Meeting**, specifically aimed at faculties and their study programmes (see above). In 2015, two new elements were added to our monitoring system due to the suspension of external quality reviews, i.e. the **peer learning visits** (see above), and a new central body for education quality assurance, the **Education Quality Board (EQB)**. The Education Quality Board is our specialist executive body which collects and analyses quality assurance data (including the peer learning visit reports and the Annual Quality Meeting). It translates this information into a quality assurance resolution for each study programme, possibly accompanied by specific remedial actions, a wardship (in Dutch: zorgelijkverklaring) or even a discontinuation of the study programme (see below for a more detailed discussion).

Proposals for improvement policy (ACT) are based on the CHECK performed by the Education Council and information gained from the Annual Quality Meeting, the peer learning visits and the quality assurance resolutions passed by the EQB. This improvement policy can contain highly specific elements (remediation trajectory for a lecturer) as well as very comprehensive elements (change of flexibilization regulations for the entire university), and may have direct impact on various levels, including students (abolishing negative marking), staff (functional career path), funding (21 additional professorial staff members for education), range of education (English-taught Master's programmes), etc.

2.4. Connection between the Three Levels

The three policy levels (study programme, faculty, university) are interconnected. Lecturers in our study programmes, or a representative delegation of lecturers, are/is represented in the Programme Committee. Programme Committee chairs, in turn, are a member of the Faculty Committee for Quality Assurance, which is chaired by the faculty Director of Studies. At university level, the eleven Directors of Studies are ex officio members of the Education Council, chaired by the Director of Education. Besides the Education Council, the Education Quality Board also operates at university level. While the Education Council mainly formulates education policy – which also indirectly affects quality assurance – it is mainly the Education Quality Board which ensures the internal “accreditation” of our study programmes. Finally, as the highest governing bodies, the Board of Governors and the Executive Board play an important role in the PDCA cycle. They receive information and advice from the Education Council and the Education Quality Board for further monitoring and decision-making.

3. The Peer Learning Visits and the Education Quality Board

As shown above, Ghent University's Quality Conduct combines new elements with a long-standing system of education policy and quality assurance. The overview below shows how Ghent University has dealt with the suspension of external quality reviews.

External Quality Reviews	Post External Quality Reviews
Visit from external review panel	Peer learning visit
NVAO framework for quality assurance	Quality manual for education
Programme's self-assessment report	Programme portfolio Faculty portfolio
NVAO (external accreditation)	Education Quality Commission (internal accreditation)

3.1. Peer Learning Visits

As explained above, the peer learning visits can be situated within the CHECK phase at programme level. Peer learning visits can be seen as internal quality reviews, or rather visits, during which a team of three Ghent University Programme Committee chairs visit another Ghent University study programme along with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA; secretary). In the course of one day, the team review the vision, policy (implementation), monitoring, and improvement policy, based on the six strategic objectives. In 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 very intentionally set up as an electronic portfolio. By using wikis, the authors and visitors can quickly navigate the different sections, can easily link documents and wikipages with each other, can work together on documents, and can make overviews quickly (e.g. of all ACT phases) by using the labels.

The assessment framework (see appendix) used by the peer learning team consists of ten dimensions. These dimensions are operationalizations of the six strategic objectives. Each dimension can be scored on a three-point scale, ranging from 'point of concern' (*Does not meet the minimum criteria. Improvement actions are required in the short term; if not, coercive measures will be imposed*), 'satisfactory' (*Largely meets the criteria. The implementation measures/initiatives taken by the programme are considered to be sufficient.*), or 'exemplary' (*The measures taken by the programme are considered to be*

excellent in all respects and can serve as an example to others.). These ten dimensions are set against the quality features of the Flemish Quality Code 2015-2017, NVAO.

With this system of peer learning visits, Ghent University consolidates some important aspects of the previous system. (1) First, there is still a thorough assessment of education 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 a programme and its didactic principles, which cannot be separated from continuous quality assurance processes. (4) Moreover, the frequency is also retained, i.e. on average every study programme is visited every six years. This time span is long enough to keep the peer learning system feasible based on the available resources, and short enough to ensure quality monitoring, in combination with the Annual Quality Meeting.

However, there are also some important differences between the peer learning visits and the external quality review. (1) First, they largely involve colleagues working in similar circumstances and can therefore be considered as *peers*, which is highly beneficial for understanding the context and framework in which everyone operates. Herein, however, also lies a potential threat. The visits may in fact be interpreted as cosy get-togethers with colleagues, thus disabling critical comments with regard to quality assurance.

(2) In addition, peer learning visits are interpreted as 'learning' visits, which shifts the focus from 'reviewing to 'mutual learning and improving'. They also aim to strengthen the cohesion between study programmes across faculties, and to share each other's good practices. Herein also lies a possible threat. Taking its cue from the external quality reviews, a visiting team may overly act as a mere assessment body, thus making an open discussion among peers difficult or even impossible.

(3) A third difference with the external quality review is that the peer learning visits not only focus on the quality of education, but also on the implementation of the institution's education policy. This enables a more direct and integrated monitoring of the strategic objectives within the study programmes.

(4) Fourth, the administrative burden traditionally associated with an external quality review/ accreditation, will be reduced over time. This is a direct result from using the programme portfolio, which is linked to the faculty portfolio and is used by the study programmes as an instrument of continuous quality assurance. In preparation of a peer learning visit, study 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 team, which is limited to one. This external member is a content expert in the field of the visited programme. Including two or more external members

would soon cause these peer learning visits to evolve into external quality reviews rather than 'learning visits'. At the same time, however, the question arises whether one external member will prove to be sufficient to review the content of an entire study programme and whether this will not lead to a unilateral perspective.

The specific methodology of the peer learning visits is set out in a scenario drafted by the Education Department (in Dutch: DOWA). The peer learning visit provides feedback about the programme to the Education Quality Board.

3.2. The Education Quality Board

The Education Quality Board (EQB) is responsible for monitoring quality assurance at Ghent University, and for developing practical proposals. This body was founded with the express purpose of shaping and closely monitoring quality assurance, and is meant to have sufficient operational authority to take quality assurance decisions without prior approval of the Education Council, the Board of Governors, or the Executive Board. The EQB is chaired by the (Deputy) Vice-Chancellor and also comprises the Director of Education, four members of the professorial staff, one member of the assistant academic staff, and two external experts from the profit and non-profit sectors. The Quality Assurance Office (part of DOWA) provides administration services. EQB members are selected primarily for their expertise or for their proven commitment to education-related matters. They do not act as representatives of their staff section or faculty, but rather as members of the monitoring and guiding body of the university as a whole.

The EQB is our specialist executive body which collects and analyses quality assurance data (including the peer learning visits and the Annual Quality Meeting) systematically. It translates this information into a quality assurance resolution for each study programme, possibly accompanied by specific remedial actions, a wardship (in Dutch: zorgelijkverklaring) or even a discontinuation of the study programme. With the establishment of the EQB, the university has created a body which closes the quality improvement cycle at university level. It is the body which supervises peer learning visits and the Annual Quality Meeting, and to which the reports of peer learning visits and the Quality Meeting are transferred for further action.

The responsibilities of the EQB include:

1. the (cyclic) discussion of the actual quality level of faculties and/or study programmes and the extent to which programmes and/or faculties take the necessary steps to ensure that quality;
2. formulating recommendations and (if necessary) coercive measures for the adjustment of quality assurance;
3. developing a framework for placing study programmes into wardship (in Dutch: zorgelijkverklaring), developing intensive coaching trajectories for those study programmes, installing procedures for informing university management of cases of wardship and of remedial procedures, and

procedures for advising the Board of Governors to revise programmes or discontinue them altogether.

4. imposing conditions on study programmes so that wardship can be avoided (if the available information gives cause to this);
5. drafting a calendar for the peer learning visits;
6. composing peer learning and appointing their chair;
7. advising university management on external reviews for certain programmes (as far as these are situated outside the regular proceedings 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 quality assurance. These advisory powers do not affect the advisory powers of other internal bodies regarding quality assurance (e.g. the Educational Council).

When reviewing study programmes, the EQB uses the information derived from the various monitoring 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 EQB are limited to quality assurance. The EQB is essentially an operational body, which must be able to answer the requirements of contemporary quality assurance quickly and efficiently. For that purpose, the EQB meets on a monthly basis. The EQB must be embedded sufficiently in education-related processes to be able to perform its duties properly. The EQB informs the Education Council on decisions and appeals to the existing expertise in the Education Council (which is in turn derived from faculties and study programmes) for carrying out its duties. The EQB is under the usual administrative supervision of the Board of Governors and the Executive Board, to which it regularly reports on matters of quality assurance. In these matters, it has extensive and independent advisory powers. For example, after a peer learning visit or an Annual Quality Meeting, the recommendation could be given to submit a deficient programme to an external quality review. In extremis, the EQB can recommend to put on hold or discontinue a study programme. A decision by the EQB's is communicated to the concerned programme and/or faculty. This decision may contain points of improvement and a timeline to realize these improvements. The EQB's recommendations are also the basis for the 'publicly available information' we publish for every study programme, as required by the NVAO's Quality Code

Appendix: Premium-Quality Education at Ghent University: 10 Assessment Dimensions

	Point of concern Does not meet the minimum criteria. Improvement actions are required in the short term; if not, coercive measures will be imposed.	Satisfactory Largely meets the criteria. The implementation measures/initiatives taken by the programme are considered to be sufficient.	Exemplary The measures taken by the programme are considered to be excellent in all respects and can serve as an example to others.	NVAO Code *
1. Dare to Think & Multiperspectivism Critical thought, open-mindedness, change in perspective, pluralism and tolerance of differing points of view take centre stage in our education.				2 5
2. Education Based on Excellent Research Education is based on excellent research and recent academic insights in the field.				1 2
3. Student and Staff Talent Development Education gives students and lecturers the chance to cultivate their talents to the fullest and provides optimal information, guidance and challenges to this end.				3 4 5 7
4. Stakeholder Involvement Students, lecturers, alumni and the field are actively involved in education, and participate in policy and assessment.				2 4
5. Internationalization Education provides students with maximum opportunities to acquire international/ Intercultural competences. To this end, efforts are directed towards internationalization projects, optimal student and staff mobility, Internationalization@Home, and virtual mobility.				1 2
6. Quality of Education:				
6.1. Vision and Learning Outcomes The study 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.				1 2
6.2. Curriculum and Constructive Alignment The study programme has a curriculum that is structured logically, and learning outcomes, curriculum and didactic methods are well aligned.				5
6.3. Assessment and Exit Level The study programme has an assessment vision and assessment policy, in line with the learning outcomes and the learning process.				6
6.4. Processes for Continuous Quality Assurance The study programme has a culture of continuous quality assurance and quality improvement.				
6.5. Communication and Information The programme shares information optimally and communicates with all parties concerned.				7 8