

Appendix 4: the External Perspective on Programme Content and Programme Quality

1. The External Perspective: Importance

In 2016, the institutional review committee advised further investment in international benchmarking and a strengthened check on study programme content (see appendix 2: NVAO Advisory Report on Ghent University's Quality Conduct).

When the new Quality Code for Higher Education (2018) came into effect, this advice became law for all higher education institutions: the external perspective becomes crucial for the assessment of programme content (e.g. study programme competencies, curriculum, exit level). The Quality Code decrees that study programmes must embed a systematic external perspective on and critical reflection of:

- being evidence-based and up to par with international standards;
- graduates' professional aptitude;
- graduates' employability;
- graduates' exit level.

Ghent University's Quality Conduct 2.0 structurally embeds the external perspective and gives it a very prominent role.

2. External Stakeholders

The Quality Code identifies two stakeholder groups for reviewing study programmes' content-related components:

- independent international peers/colleagues/experts;
- professional field, alumni, relevant other external parties.

The involvement of external parties and, particularly, their **independence** is an aspect that will most certainly be examined in light of the Quality Code and the next institutional review. External parties come in various degrees of independence. For example, work placement supervisors are closely involved in a study programme's education processes, while international peers are further removed. It is important that study programmes address a broad mix of stakeholders.

3. The External Perspective: Expectations for Study Programmes and Faculties

The Quality Conduct 2.0 wants to facilitate and stimulate self-management as much as possible. Study programmes and faculties are responsible for introducing a structural external perspective on education. Faculties must provide their study programmes with specific support services.

Almost all study programmes and faculties regularly involve stakeholder parties to bring in an external perspective. These existing practices can serve as a good starting point for a further establishment of the external perspective in a more systematic, formal and transparent way, as is currently laid down by the Quality Code for Higher Education.

What are minimal requirements for study programmes?

- i. each study programme seeks out a **broad range** of external stakeholders (minimally including the professional field, alumni, and international peers) to review its content-related components – including (at the very least) its programme competencies (learning outcomes), curriculum, assessment and exit level. The Education Department provides supporting information on possible **actions and teaching methods** to this end. The actions aimed at introducing the external perspective must always be **traceable** in the sense that study programmes discuss their policy, (planned) actions and the result of those actions – the input obtained and whether or not that input is acted upon – during Programme Committee meetings and keeps records in their Education Monitor.
- ii. on an annual basis, the Study Programme Committee is to discuss the results of **programme-specific** surveys of the professional field, or of other structurally involved stakeholders, and of **institutionally organized alumni surveys**, as they become available in the Education Monitor via UGI. These surveys form a starting point for **self-reflection** and analysis;
- iii. the programme is to conduct a programme review. This entails that at least **three international, independent, academic peers** with a broad view on the programme, are asked to review programme content quality, either individually or in a panel. Such a programme review is to take place once every four years (or in the context of a major curriculum revision). The focus of the programme review is to check whether or not programme competencies (learning outcomes), curriculum, assessment, and exit level are up to standard.

4. The External Perspective: follow-up by the Education Quality Board

The Education Quality Board (EQB) screens study programme quality based on three criteria:

- the congruence between data found in UGI (among other things) and in the Education Monitor (including among others a self-evaluation);
- the extent to which the external perspective has been embedded;
- the study programme's quality culture

The Education Quality Board is specifically tasked with monitoring the successfulness of the external perspective in study programmes (i.e. how they involve international peers and professional field representatives), how they deal with feedback by externals in the Programme Committee, and how they implement (improvement) actions whenever necessary.

In light of this task, the EQB will be able to count on the expertise of a number of external members.