



Inspectie van het Onderwijs
Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en
Wetenschap

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Further Improvement: A Closer Look

The conference, background and good practices



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The value of a diploma must be beyond all doubt. Both students and society have a right to be assured of that. This is an issue in which examination boards play a crucial role. On 20 May 2015 the Inspectorate of Education held the Further Improvement conference, which shares its title with the inquiry by the Inspectorate into the performance of higher-education examination boards. The results were published in the spring of this year. The report provides an outline of where examination boards currently stand, and indicates where further improvements can be made.

Over 600 participants from research universities, universities of applied sciences and non-government-funded institutions attended the conference, which owed its success to the exchange of a wide range of experiences, active participation by attendees in one or more of the 23 workshops, and presentations by countless interesting speakers.

This e-magazine aims to serve both as a report of the conference and as a reference work for all examination boards and managers in higher education. In addition

to reading the reports and interviews, we recommend that you follow the links under 'more information'. These form a repository of useful documents, good practices and tools by other examination boards and organisations in higher education.

This e-magazine is the fruit of collaboration between many workshop facilitators, all of whom seek to contribute to the quality of higher education from their own position of responsibility. I offer them my thanks, and hope that after the conference, this e-magazine will also contribute to further improvement among examination boards.

Monique Vogelzang
Inspector-General of Education

June 2015



Monique Vogelzang
Inspector-General of Education

HOW TO READ THIS E-MAGAZINE

Browse through the text, or click the menu on the left to proceed to the next section. To view a workshop, click 'Workshops' in the left-hand menu and then select the relevant workshop from the list. You can also find the workshops by simply browsing through the magazine.

The top-right corner of every workshop (except the first, which is of a general nature) outlines the relevance of the workshop to the Further Improvement report.

Links to relevant documents can be accessed at the bottom left of each section or workshop, under 'More information'. Click the documents to view them. The back of the magazine contains an overview of the key background documents, including links.

Opening a link will close this magazine. If you want to be able to switch between the magazine and one of the background documents, download the PDF first and the link will open in your browser automatically. We recommend downloading a new PDF each time, as small improvements will be made from time to time.

If you would prefer to read the paper version of this e-magazine, simply print it as you would with any other document. You will not be able to use the links, however.



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‘Welcome to the conference on the Inspectorate’s report concerning the performance of examination boards. The amount of interest in this conference was enormous. We were expecting around 300 people, but soon exceeded that number. After only ten days we had received over 500 registrations, and we ultimately cut off the applications at 650. Otherwise we would have had to hire Ahoy... Around 80 of our attendees come from non-government-funded higher education institutions, 330 from funded universities of applied sciences and 160 from research universities. And, last but not least, the 65 other participants: our workshop facilitators and representatives from other organisations.’

I am pleased to introduce you to Martine Pol, the project manager of this inquiry. If you have any questions about the inquiry, or if you wish to organise a presentation by the Inspectorate as a follow-up to this conference at your own institution, please contact Martine via m.pol@owinsp.nl.’

Erik Martijnse
Day’s chairman

‘Welcome to the conference on the Inspectorate’s report’

I would like to step back in time for a moment, to 27 March 2012 and the motion submitted by Hans Beertema. A majority in the Dutch Lower House of Parliament had lost all confidence in the value of higher-education diplomas. The proposition was to banish examinations from institutions, and replace them with final examinations at national level. Just like driving exams, a centralised body would be responsible for higher-education diplomas. Bye-bye examination boards: that’s how low confidence had dropped. And where are we today?



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Further Improvement*

Bookkeeper or watchful eye?

Towards further improvement

Monique Vogelzang

The Further Improvement* report describes the current situation with respect to examination boards. In her opening address, Inspector-General Monique Vogelzang outlined the main points..

Do you all remember your first swimming diploma? First the cold and nervous wait at the edge of the pool, then a minute of treading water, and then finally swimming to the other end with your clothes on, heavy as lead. But if you made it, the big moment arrived: your first diploma! It was the proof that you could do it, the reward.

So I know that we all have at least one diploma, but many more probably followed after that. And where do you actually keep them all? Has anybody ever asked you for the physical proof of your graduation? Employers rarely do. And yet the existence of diplomas is important to employers, employees and to society: they are the proof that as a graduate, you possess a certain level of knowledge and skills. The value of diplomas must therefore remain uncontested. But how do we ensure their value? In higher education institutions it is the task and responsibility of examination boards to ensure that the examination process runs as it should, and that the diploma represents an appropriate 'reward' for the achievement of graduation.

As the Inspectorate, we investigated how examination boards have developed since the previous inquiry in 2008 titled 'Bookkeeper or watchful eye?' (Boekhouder of wakend oog?). Our studies have shown

that their performance has improved over the last six years, especially in higher professional education. Testing is higher up on the agenda, and examination boards are formulating guidelines for the administration and evaluation of tests. They have also become more independent: their members include fewer and fewer managers, and are almost always appointed by the executive board. Lastly, expertise has increased: many examination boards have taken targeted steps to further professional development.

Developmental stage

Although major steps have been taken in recent years, we can see that examinations boards are still in the developmental stage. There are two major areas for improvement. Firstly, there needs to be a greater focus on testing. The guidelines for creating tests can be refined, and monitoring of compliance can also be improved – particularly with guidelines pertaining to fraud. Some examination boards fail to properly monitor the guidelines' effectiveness. A second area for improvement is the appointment of examiners. Although examiners usually are appointed, this is often done implicitly: one third of examiners actually claim not to know whether the examination board has appointed them or not. Who is responsible if examiners fail to perform up to standard? The examination board, or their manager?

This area therefore requires further improvement. A prerequisite for improvement is administrative support. Now that the flexibility of higher education is increasing, the quality assurance role of examination boards is becoming more and more important. Examination boards are working hard to fulfil >>



Opening Monique Vogelzang

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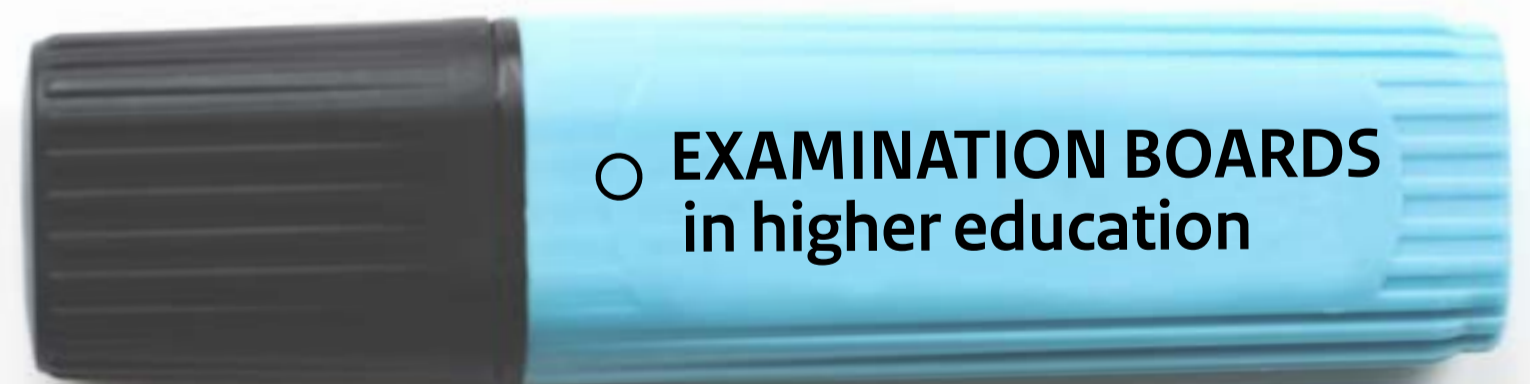
>> this role effectively, however quality assurance is a task that involves the entire institution. Executive boards must give examination boards enough time for their professional development and for the performance of their duties.

Know thyself

Society needs proper examination boards. To help improve their position, I would like to give the examination boards some unsolicited advice: get to know yourselves, and use the tools you have at your disposal. Every board has its own concerns and issues. Investigate whether you are fulfilling all the required duties, and whether you do so effectively and productively. Use our inquiry and other sources as a performance checklist. Examination boards can also learn from each other – developments by one board may well be of use to another. Exchange knowledge, work together, and share good practices. Umbrella organisations will also play a key role in this respect.

We jumped in the deep end a long time ago, and the swimming diplomas are in. Now it is time to learn to freestyle.

‘There needs to be a greater focus on testing. The guidelines for creating tests can be refined, and monitoring of compliance can also be improved’



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Further Improvement*

Bookkeeper or watchful eye?

Interview VSNU, VH, NRTO

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‘Students should be proud of their diplomas’

Interview with Karl Dittrich (Association of Universities in the Netherlands, VSNU), Thom de Graaf (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, VH) and Hans Hillen (Dutch Council for Training and Education, NRTO)

The Further Improvement* report has shown that examination boards have made considerable progress in recent years. What have they achieved? And, more importantly: where will the focus lie in the years ahead? Inspector-General Monique Vogelzang interviewed umbrella organisation presidents Karl Dittrich (VSNU), Thom de Graaf (VH) and Hans Hillen (NRTO) about the results of the inquiry.

The three gentlemen on stage all agreed: although there has been major progress, the continued development of examination boards remains a priority. Thom de Graaf: ‘Universities of applied sciences are moving in the right direction, but that’s no reason for us to sit back and relax. We’re still going

full steam ahead, by training examination board members and developing informative materials.’ By way of illustration, he handed Monique Vogelzang the first copy of the second edition of the *Examination Committee Guide* (Handreiking examencommissies), hot off the presses from that very morning.

Freedom

In answer to the question of where the focus of universities of applied sciences should lie in the years ahead, De Graaf named network formation and the improved internal orientation of examination boards within the universities, with specific attention to professional development. Hans Hillen stressed the independence of examination boards.>>

‘The report allows for sufficient leeway, which the examination boards need to take advantage of’



Karl Dittrich
President, Association of Universities in the Netherlands



Thom de Graaf
President, Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences



Hans Hillen
President, Dutch Council for Training and Education

Further Improvement

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>> 'Independence is necessary for an objective assessment of lecturers' and students' performance.' Professionals also require freedom, he said, in order to structure their study programmes. 'Although we are seeing more and more standardisation in this country, creativity in education is just as important. The Further Improvement report allows for sufficient leeway, which the examination boards need to take advantage of.'

Karl Dittrich took a similar view. 'I read the report with a certain degree of surprise and admiration. We are almost on our way to creating a perfect society! But at the same time, we need to make sure that the great does not become the enemy of the good. Shouldn't we be moving away from protocols, and towards increased faith in the profession?' Thom de Graaf did not believe that the report places any undue emphasis on regulations. 'I think that people in research-oriented education, higher professional education and non-government-funded education are all colleagues who can learn a lot from each other. The report includes suggestions for doing so.'

Confidence restored

We also need to consider everything that is moving in the right direction, said Karl Dittrich. 'We should be pleased with what we are doing right, and find out what we can do better. Society's confidence in education has been restored, and we need to let people know we are happy about it.' The others concurred. Hillen: 'Students should be proud of their diplomas.'



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**Thom de Graaf offers Monique Vogelzang
the first copy of the Guide**

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[Letter to the Lower House](#)

‘Things are going well, but there is room for further improvement’



Jet Bussemaker
Minister of Education,
Culture and Science

Much to her regret, Minister Jet Bussemaker was unable to attend the conference today. She did send a video message to highlight the importance of examination boards.

The minister was pleased with the improved levels of quality assurance for all types of interim and final examinations. Examination boards are increasingly able to guarantee the value of the diplomas issued. However, further steps can – and must – be taken. Some examination boards and programme managers, for example, have no clear view of their powers or of the statutory frameworks in which they operate. To perform effectively, examination boards must also be given adequate support for the fulfilment of their duties and for professional development. In many cases, that support is lacking. Lastly, the minister provided some food for thought: what areas for improvement can you identify within your own board? Where do the priorities lie in the professional development of examination boards and examiners? And how will you carry on tomorrow with what you have discussed today?



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Students demand improved testing

Interview with Yvonne Rouwhorst and Lianne van Kessel (ISO)

Although students would rather pass an exam than fail, they greatly value objective testing. During the conference we spoke to Yvonne Rouwhorst and Lianne van Kessel from the Dutch National Student Association (ISO) about testing and examination boards. Rouwhorst is an ISO board member whose remit includes the legal status of students, and the quality of teaching. As a project officer, Van Kessel conducts research into topics such as testing and feedback.

But why is testing so important to students?

‘Students place great importance on proper testing. Any diploma they might earn is only worth something if it represents a certain level of quality. And because a diploma is the sum total of all the programme components, each of which often concludes with a test or examination, it is important for the testing to be of a proper quality. Formative testing – the ongoing process of collecting information on learning results – is also of great importance, and concentrates on providing students with information on their current progress and about how they can learn from their

mistakes. This aspect receives insufficient focus in the Inspectorate’s report.’

What is your idea of proper testing?

‘An effective examination needs to satisfy many requirements, but the most important is that it is part of a well-considered testing policy in line with the study programme’s core values. So the structure, content and timing of the exam need to fit within the programme as a whole, and be relevant to the skills students will need when they enter “the real world” with their degree in hand.’

What do you want from an examination board?

‘The job of an examination board is to ensure that tests and testing policy match the programme’s core values. In the future, the ISO plans to move towards learning outcomes, tests and assessments that are formulated independently of any particular learning track. This will give students greater freedom to design their course of study in a manner that suits them. Examination boards play a major role in this respect: they evaluate whether students ultimately satisfy the exit qualifications set out in the Teaching and Examination Regulations.’

>>



‘Any diploma is only worth something if it represents a certain level of quality’

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ISO bottleneck report

>> The Further Improvement report states that communication with students and the transparency of examination boards' processes are points for improvement. Would you agree?

'The ISO's bottleneck report (knelpuntennotitie) that has now prompted a legal-status inquiry commissioned by Minister Bussemaker, raised the issue of procedures and information provision. Careless procedures regarding examination boards and inadequate information for students concerning their status in the process are fairly commonplace. For example, examination boards often contain the very lecturers who are the subject of complaints of a failure to act objectively. Students' study progress can also be delayed due to slow-moving appeals procedures. Sometimes the procedure for a thesis re-assessment by a second examiner, for example, is convoluted or simply unknown. The ISO is very concerned that procedures often lack transparency – students do not know where to turn, and if they do submit a complaint, they receive no confirmation

of receipt. Deadlines are missed, and where and how the complaint should be answered is unclear. There is definitely plenty of room for improvement.'

Lastly, we know that you are working on a report dealing with feedback. Can you reveal any details?

'The ISO is currently investigating best practices for testing and feedback. In the future, feedback will become a more important and valuable component of the study process. Developments such as digital education and tests will allow teaching staff to provide feedback much faster and more directly. The ISO is arguing for teaching materials that are more open and include integrated feedback: they yield better results. Feedback should be more than just a grade. Research has also shown that students' need for feedback decreases once they have received a grade, and peer feedback will take on a more important role. Students from all kinds of institutions – including internationally – will be able to provide each other with feedback online, a

process that teaching staff can follow online and supervise if necessary. Feedback is a continuous process, not a snapshot.'

'Digital education will allow teaching staff to provide feedback much faster'



Overview of workshops

The conference included a total of 23 workshops. Click on the workshop number to skip to the relevant page.

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(Inspectorate of Education)

2. The Examination Board Guide: an authoritative document

Roeland Smits, Caroline Stam, Jokelyne Gerritsen (VH)

3. Quality assurance and the performance of examination boards

Martin Kropff (Wageningen University)

4. Quality quantified: the building-blocks of a (centralised) examination board

Martine Pieters, Justus Tengbergen, Nico Scheeres, Markus Verbeek (NCOI)

5. Examination boards: a question of culture?

Sibe Doosje, Marie-Jet Fennema (Utrecht University)

6. Collaboration on test quality: rules of engagement

Mieke Jaspers, Els van Zijl (Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences)

7. Quality assurance: from regulations to understanding

Edith Hooge (TIAS, Tilburg University)

8. The examination board through the eyes of a student

Klaasjan Boon (LSVb)

9. The examination board as a professional community

John Huizinga (TIAS, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences), Frans de Vijlder
(HAN University of Applied Sciences)

10. Tests, examination and the role of examination boards in higher education accreditation

Wienke Blomen, Frank Hendriks, Robert Stapert (Hobéon)

11. How can institutions work on the test expertise of their examiners?

Remko van der Lei, Brenda Aalders (Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen)

12. Calibration of final assignment submissions in higher education

Marlies van Beek (Cito)

13. The interpretation of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) in relation to examination boards

Patrick Leushuis, Trees Ruijgrok (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science)

14. The examination board in the legal precedents of the Higher Education Appeals Tribunal

Willem Beijk, Jan Nijenhof, Ben Olivier (CvBHO)

15&16. Valid and reliable testing in art education

Anton Neggens (Fontys), Jackelien ter Burg (ArtEZ), Jan Wirken
(Zuyd University of Applied Sciences)

17. Testing: not less, just different

Lex Jansen (handicap + studie Expertise Centre)

18. Fraud: from practice to policy

Ludo van Meeuwen (Eindhoven University of Technology), Arie de Wild
(Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences)

19. The examination board, the management and administration: a 'dynamic' relationship

Jan Wiss (Inholland)

20. Dilemmas in the work of examination board members

Frans de Vijlder (HAN University of Applied Sciences)

21. Research universities and universities of applied sciences: learn from each other!

Susan Voogd (VU)

22. Testing and assessment, and the limited evaluation of study programmes

/ Sietze Looijenga (QANU), Hester Minnema (Leiden University), Ivo van Stokkum (VU University Amsterdam)

23. Ensuring quality and standards in joint higher-education programmes with international partner institutions

Peter Wieringa, Marinke Sussenbach (TU Delft)

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Further Improvement Teaching Café

Martine Pol, Anne-Marie van Rijsbergen, Annelies Bon, Jan Willem Roodenberg (Inspectorate of Education)

One important way to achieve further improvement in examination boards is through the mutual exchange of experiences and entering into dialogues with one another. What exactly are the core tasks of examination boards? How does the Inspectorate conduct its supervision? What expectations can be placed on examiners? Members of examination boards discussed these and other topics at the Teaching Café with their colleagues and with the inspectors who carried out the Further Improvement inquiry. We present some of their discussions below.

At the café's four tables a lively debate was conducted. At one table, higher education inspectors Martine Pol (Further Improvement project manager), Anne-Marie van Rijsbergen, Annelies Bon and Jan Willem Roodenberg were busy answering questions on the inquiry. Topics of discussion included the confidentiality of the questionnaire, the selection of institutions and the status of the report's '[good practices](#)' (see the 'Inspectorate's procedures' link for the answers to these questions).

Participants in the discussions also had the opportunity to respond to [the report](#) itself. One of the tables, for example, discussed the question of whether the limited rates of fraud among such large student numbers are really as noteworthy as the report claims. Surely it is logical, argued

an examination board member, for fraud to go unnoticed in such cases? Discussion also turned to [the pilot](#) conducted by the Inspectorate at Fontys as part of the inquiry, in which the two institutions trialled a procedure that makes supervision both more effective and less labour-intensive.

Does examiners' test expertise require further improvement?

At the next table, there was some controversy surrounding examiners' testing skills and the support they receive to develop them. Many examination boards called to make this aspect a higher priority during the inquiry, while many examiners claimed to be generally quite satisfied with the amount of time, support and the training opportunities they received for examination purposes. So why do the opinions of examination boards and examiners differ so greatly? How can this discrepancy be explained?

This difference in perspective came up a lot during the discussion: examination boards have a different focus and interest, and a better overall view of the programme than the examiners, allowing them to see the discrepancies more easily. Another possible contributing factor is the fact that not all examiners view teaching as their most important task – lecturers at research universities in particular tend to focus on research, making testing somewhat of a forgotten step-child. Some lecturers are also less inclined to spend time on testing because they do not enjoy it, or prefer to dedicate more time to teaching and student supervision.

'Effective supervision means that the Inspectorate should be open to such invitations'

Special publication

The results of the questionnaire have left examination board members a little bewildered, because they do hear lecturers complaining that they have too little time for testing. Some lecturers actually report that they recycle old exams for this very reason. The results of the inquiry would therefore seem to require more in-depth examination in this respect, and the Inspectorate is considering releasing a special publication on the subject of examiners, incorporating the input from the discussions at this table.

In the future, institutions may organise their own events on ways to improve examination boards. The inspectors have expressed their willingness to contribute, emphasising that effective supervision means being open to such invitations.

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[Bookkeeper or watchful eye?](#)

The Examination Board Guide: an authoritative document

Roeland Smits and Caroline Stam (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences), and Jokelyne Gerritsen (Windesheim University of Applied Sciences)

The Further Improvement* report has shown that funded universities of applied sciences are performing well in terms of implementing the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act. Since the previous inquiry (Bookkeeper or watchful eye?) into the role and performance of examination boards, higher professional education has made considerable progress. The Examination Board Guide published by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH, 2011) made a major contribution to this process. On 20 May 2015, a second edition of the Guide was released,

and Roeland Smits and Caroline Stam demonstrated how it can be used to aid the implementation of the Further Improvement* recommendations.

The Examination Board Guide has developed into an authoritative document, and even earned a reference in the Council of State's recommendations concerning the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act. This workshop devoted particular attention to the Inspectorate's recommendation to produce an unambiguous interpretation of the statutory framework. The Guide can contribute to this desired process of clarification, making it relevant to the focus areas outlined in Further Improvement*. For example, it discusses the question of whether examination boards are authorised to revoke an examiner's appointment – a question that various examination boards grapple with, the report showed. (Incidentally, the Guide's answer to this question is 'yes'.)

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate advises examination boards to develop a clear, joint interpretation of the applicable legislation. The Examination Board Guide by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) can be a valuable asset in this regard. This workshop looked at relevant points from the Guide that can be used to implement the recommendations from the Inspectorate's report.



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*English translation

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‘We like to get people thinking’

Interview with Roeland Smits & Caroline Stam (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences)

How does the second edition of the Examination Board Guide differ from the first?

‘The second edition of the Guide is both the same as, and totally different from, the first. The structure, template, target audience and approach are all the same. The difference lies in the fact that we have included a number of legislative changes that have been adopted since the first edition, as well as the results of the Further Improvement* report. There is too little time to list all the differences here: suffice it to say that the Guide has been updated in a range of areas, including the relationships between examination boards and institutional (and other) management, the boards’ role in instances of fraud, and guaranteeing the exit levels for diplomas.’

Did you incorporate professional development experiences when preparing the second edition?

‘Certainly. The Association has already run a total of seven training sessions for examination board members. We definitely expect an eighth, and possibly even a ninth or tenth group to follow. With 45 participants in each group, this means that

we will have trained a total of over 400 examination board members, all of whom also share their knowledge and experience with their colleagues. Each session consists of three sections: testing, legal issues and the position of the examination board within the organisation. We incorporated trainers’ experiences gained during the sessions into the Guide as much as we could. Just like the first edition of the Guide, however, the second edition will continue to focus on the statutory tasks and authorisations of examination boards.’

What is your opinion of the conference, and what is your contribution?

‘Events like this are not only fun, they’re very instructive too. Our interactive workshops are educational to us as well. We learn from the participants. The most important thing, we believe, is to get people thinking. When they get home tonight, it is my hope that people will go through the workshop again in their minds and critically ask themselves how they intend to follow up on it. We hope to send the participants home full of energy, just like we are.’



Caroline Stam
Legal policy adviser, Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences & HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht



Roeland Smits
Senior legal affairs and quality policy adviser, Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences

‘We have included the results of the inspection report in our update of the Guide’

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Quality assurance and the performance of examination boards

Martin Kropff
(Wageningen University)

Establishing, documenting and implementing testing policy is a complex process, especially at a university with such a strong international perspective as Wageningen. Still, the programmes at Wageningen University have received positive evaluations for years, the more ‘difficult’ programmes in particular. Why is this, and what role do the university’s four examination boards play in the process? Rector Magnificus Martin Kropff presented his views.

Wageningen University offers 19 BSc and 28 MSc programmes to more than 10,000 students from over 100 countries. The high level of programme diversity and complexity requires not one, but four examination boards, each with qualified members. Strikingly enough, the university never has any major problems finding new examination board members. The university’s good reputation, and the fact that the examination boards receive adequate support, help to ensure sufficient interest. The high number of positively evaluated MSc programmes (21) is a testament to the examination boards’ effective performance.

International testing hardly problematic
Many questions were asked by the audience during the well-attended presentation, with particular attention to Wageningen University’s international focus on quality assurance. How do they guarantee the quality of interim and final examinations completed abroad? Examination board members at Wageningen maintain regular contact on this issue with teaching staff in other countries, Kropff said. Work is also

underway on standardising the process for converting foreign grades into those used at Wageningen University, as research has shown that international interim and final examinations are graded more highly than in the Netherlands. For this reason, an assessor from the home university largely determines the grade to be awarded for examinations or internship reports completed abroad. International assessors and supervisors play an advisory role, but have no decisive power in this process. Standardisation of this practice has ensured a uniform assessment procedure.

Some attendees struggled with the problem of how to properly and remotely assess students who are completing internships abroad. Visits to the host organisation are not unheard of, but come at great expense. The audience advised increased use of video technology. A second suggestion was the development of joint tests, which provide a clearer picture of internship quality. >>

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’
In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within their institutions. It is also important for the executive board to use the examination board’s annual report to enhance both the board’s position and the quality of examinations. During this workshop and follow-up interview, Wageningen University Rector Magnificus Martin Kropff explained his university’s approach to these aspects.

‘The audience advised using video technology in the assessment of students completing internships abroad’

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>> Plenty of room for improvement

After his presentation, Kropff put forward several propositions for the audience to debate. But the nature and importance of the subject at hand was only highlighted by the fact that the propositions could not be dealt with: the audience continued to ask questions, which Kropff answered enthusiastically. All those present acknowledged the importance of good-quality education and proper testing. And although things were moving in the right direction, there was still plenty of room for improvement. Thankfully everyone was prepared to pitch in.



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‘The executive board and examination boards must work in tandem’

Interview with Martin Kropff (Wageningen University)

What changes have affected the examination boards at Wageningen University in recent years?

‘In addition to student-related activities, such as approving subject profiles and courses attended abroad, and issuing exemptions and diplomas, examination boards were also assigned a new task: quality assurance for interim and final examinations, as a consequence of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act. I am proud to say that the examination boards shouldered this responsibility in a rigorous and dynamic fashion. In doing so they considered which role they wish to play in the quality control cycle at Wageningen University in order to fulfil this responsibility. They have drawn up a testing and assessment policy that describes their assurance system. Research group visits form part of this policy, which involve the examination board visiting a research group to discuss the examinations with all examiners. This is not only inspiring to lecturers, but also provides them with useful feedback on the design of their exams.’

Can you describe the communication between the executive board and examination boards?

‘In their annual reports, the examination boards outline the activities they have carried out that are designed to evaluate the quality of interim and final examinations. They also advise the executive board on matters that warrant its attention in this respect. One such matter concerns whether the current capacity of examination boards is still adequate, given the rising student population. Based on the annual report, I hold discussions with the four chairpersons. Ensuring the quality of interim and final

examinations is a vast and complex task, and substantial growth in student numbers is increasing our workloads even more. I resolved to make sure that examination boards have enough freedom to develop at a professional level. That means that we as a university must make enough time and capacity available for the performance of these tasks – both to the examination boards, and to the lecturers and examiners in the research groups.’

Is a certain institutional culture required in order for examination boards to perform effectively?

‘Definitely, an open culture with short lines of communication helps to initiate discussions on quality. But that same open culture must also be secured through clear and concise regulations. Clarity is important; too much bureaucracy is seen as cumbersome. We have found an effective balance between an open culture and clearly defined rules. The examination board members act mostly on their own initiative, but you do need the right people – people who have the organisation’s confidence. One crucial requirement is for the executive board and examination boards to work in tandem towards the same goals.’

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

‘I would like to stress how important the theme of today’s conference is. I will be leaving for Mexico soon, but I am happy to be here today. We must all work together to reach our goal of ensuring high-quality education, and the Inspectorate plays an important part in this process. The existing regulations and quality assurance systems enable the provision of quality study



Martin Kropff
Rector magnificus, Wageningen UR

‘The examination boards shouldered their responsibility in a rigorous fashion’

programmes, delivering well-educated students. Wageningen University aims to be the best. For years now we have received high scores for 21 of our 28 MSc programmes, and our BSc programmes perform well too. The examination boards play a significant part in this achievement, ensuring (among other things) that the quality of our programmes remains high.’

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NCOI reports

Workshop Presentation

Quality quantified: the building-blocks of a (centralised) examination board

Martine Pieters, Justus Tengbergen and Nico Scheeres (NCOI)

Examination boards are responsible for the quality of examinations. However, in the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW), one of the most important aspects of examination – determining the results – is delegated to the examiner. So how can examination boards ensure they are always in control? Martine Pieters, Justus Tengbergen and Nico Scheeres outlined how the NCOI and NTI Universities of Applied Sciences deal with this dilemma.

Effective administrative organisation and internal control (AO/IC) lays the foundations for an examination board that performs well, and is also essential to collaboration between the examination board and the exam administration. The basic components of AO/IC include legislation, the integrity of all parties concerned, segregation of control duties, manageable processes (including risk management) and monitoring. Although Pieters and Tengbergen devoted attention to all AO/IC components, they focused on the last three, which are key factors in determining the extent to which an examination board is in control.

The institution's executive board is responsible for structuring and supporting the entire AO/IC; the examination board is responsible for its operation. One complicating element is the fact that the examination board does not itself carry out all the activities necessary for remaining in control. Without personally assessing an

examination themselves, how can anybody know whether the result is an accurate representation of the student's level? NCOI and NTI have set up a rigorous AO/IC system to address this very problem, as Pieters and Tengbergen explained.

Reports and standards

The two universities of applied sciences have defined separate roles for the activities of teaching, examination design and examination assessment (i.e. segregation of duties) and documented their processes (ISO 9001). They also have a clear reporting structure that gives the examination board insight into existing and potential risks. The reports provide information on the quality of examinations and the performance of examiners, and identify potentially weaker students. Comparison against standards (including bandwidths) enables the examination board to take prompt, targeted action whenever necessary, resulting in an examination board that is genuinely 'in control'.

'A clear reporting structure gives the examination board insight into existing and potential risks'

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

The report states that most examination boards monitor the quality of testing by investigating the quality of examinations, ascertaining whether guidelines are being followed, and similar means. This workshop examined the administrative organisation and internal control (AO/IC) necessary in order for examination boards to provide effective supervision.

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‘I’m mainly here just to listen, I’d like to learn how to measure quality. Sure, everybody has opinions about quality, but I doubt whether such opinions are always objective. I mean, surely it’s important to know what a diploma is worth, and how well a student has performed? Of course you can assess this using examinations, but how do you measure the quality of the examination itself? On the other hand, perhaps we are trying to measure and quantify too much, but that’s a completely different kettle of fish.’

Siert Knigge
External Chairman of the Central Examination Board for Zeeland University of Applied Sciences

‘I actually have the day off today, but I’m still glad to be here. It’s educational and fun. I’m glad that the Inspectorate (that is, the government) has finally taken the initiative to get all of the examination boards together in the spirit of enthusiasm, rather than supervision. I think it’s important for the Inspectorate to provide opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange. We all need to collaborate more effectively to improve. Today, I hope to learn more from my colleagues about the precarious balance between what we want to achieve, and the resources and support we need for that. Networking is also an important element, which the workshops cater for very well. Hopefully they’ll organise more of these events, a shindig like this once a year seems like a good idea to me. I think that the fact it is happening at all is a success.’

Frans de Swart
Chairman of the NTI Examination Board & member of the Inholland Graduation Committee



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Examination boards: A question of culture?

Sibe Doosje and Marie-Jet Fennema
(Utrecht University)

Do universities benefit from a single uniform quality assurance system, or is it better for a system to cater for the specialised nature and culture within degree programmes? Utrecht University believes the latter. The Utrecht internal quality assurance system describes the ‘what’ (i.e. the minimum requirements) but not the ‘how’, and the university promotes a culture of dialogue and mutual learning. Marie-Jet Fennema and Sibe Doosje explained the approach taken by Utrecht University.

The belief at Utrecht University is that quality education begins with a clear vision, which they have documented in a [University Directive](#) that applies to all study programmes. The associated quality assurance system allows plenty of freedom for local interpretation, based on the nature and culture of each faculty. Accordingly, Utrecht University has no university-wide manuals for examination boards, although it does produce guidebooks.

Shared responsibility

No matter how good a quality assurance system looks on paper, its effectiveness will hinge on the right culture to sustain it, said Marie-Jet Fennema. A culture in which requesting and receiving feedback is a matter of course, where there is continuous improvement, and one that also aids the realisation that the system is part of a larger institutional whole, so that quality assurance becomes a truly shared responsibility. To create the desired quality assurance culture, Utrecht University has established three key principles: monitoring and critical reflection, innovation, and fostering leadership development.

This approach also applies to examination boards. For example, the rector and the dean hold an annual quality assurance meeting whose agenda includes the examination boards’ performance; examination board networks hold regular events; the university earmarks funds for the encouragement of innovation in education; and there is an academic leadership training programme.

Successful approach

Utrecht University’s experience with examination boards shows that this approach is successful. Despite the lack of prescribed procedures, examination boards have learned from each other’s practices – both good and bad. In the course of time, they started operating in more or less the same way. Most boards, for example, now have a separate assessment quality committee that advises them on the quality of tests.

As an example of innovation, Sibe Doosje cited the dialogue on the evaluation of multiple-choice questions that has sprung up within the Faculty of Humanities. The MC+ project, with funding from the university’s education innovation budget, has put that [dialogue](#) in the spotlight and accelerated its progress. The project has also led to the production of a guidebook intended to increase the quality of multiple-choice testing, and has helped to raise awareness of responsible testing methods among examiners. MC+ has also generated more shared ownership of the quality of testing. This multiple-choice question approach is expected to spread to other faculties.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. This also means that the executive board must provide an organisational structure and a quality assurance culture that recognises and acknowledges the examination boards’ importance. This workshop examined various ways to encourage a quality assurance culture.

TIPS FOR A BETTER QUALITY CULTURE

During the workshop, participants were asked what examination boards could do to promote a quality culture. The responses yielded a number of useful suggestions:

- Start discussions and keep lines of communication open.
- The examination board should give lecturers the opportunity to submit an exam to them before administering it to students. This will enable the examination board to evaluate the quality of the exam in advance.
- Explain the importance of good-quality tests to lecturers, as well as the role played by the examination board and what they can expect from them. Communicate and advise.
- Appoint somebody with legal and/or mediation expertise as an external member of the examination board.
- Let the common good prevail, and make all those involved aware of their role within the larger context of quality assurance.

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Collaboration Guide

Advisory report Role of the examination board

Collaboration on test quality: rules of engagement

Els van Zijl and Mieke Jaspers (Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences)

Curriculum committees, testing and assessment experts, examiners, administrative staff, invigilators, timetablers... There are many bodies and officers besides the examination board who are involved in testing and examination. Chaos, ad-hoc solutions and the constant feeling of having to ‘reinvent the wheel’ are the results of a lack of systematic cooperation among the various parties. In this workshop, Els van Zijl and Mieke Jaspers discussed a number of strategies to help avoid these situations.

Since 2010 and the introduction of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act, it has been the responsibility of examination boards to ensure the quality of testing and examinations – a significant and pro-active steering and monitoring role in the quality assurance system for testing and examination. In practice, however,

the role of ‘watchdog’ raises several questions. Who directs the examination board? Who is responsible for the quality of testing? What is the role of testing and assessment experts, or a potential assessment committee? It is important that everybody’s role be clearly defined, and that they do not overstep the bounds of their authority or expertise. Fontys has documented these principles in a number of guidelines (see the interview on the following page).

Van Zijl and Jaspers argued for a culture focused on development, in which professionals are and remain responsible for the quality of the tests. The examination board alerts and advises the management on how to structure the organisation of testing to include adequate ‘inbuilt’ guarantees, so that quality can always be ensured. Van Zijl and Jaspers emphasised the fact that this is primarily a question of structure: only this way can the organisation grow to reduce the need for monitoring and interventions, on the part of both examination boards and the management.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. To aid this process, examination boards, executive boards and examiners are advised to discuss how they wish to distribute the responsibilities and authorisations. This workshop presented some potential guidelines to use when doing so.



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‘We must move towards a culture focused on development, a culture that allows for mistakes to be made’

Els van Zijl and Mieke Jaspers (Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences)

What are the key rules when it comes to collaboration between faculty management, the examination board, testing and assessment experts and the Fontys executive board?

‘We stick to a number of rules that we have drawn up based on our experiences from recent years. The first key rule is for everybody to adhere strictly to their role in the process, according to clearly defined tasks. We have noticed that a failure to properly delineate roles, duties and responsibilities can quickly lead to annoyance, frustration and occasionally even conflicts. Secondly, there must be regular consultation between the executive board and examination boards based on a joint plan and thorough analyses. Examination boards regularly report that their observations and analyses do not prompt any action. Furthermore, expectations must be effectively managed, and appropriate to the organisation’s current stage of development.

A third rule that we would like to mention is that the examination board must not appropriate any other tasks from the ‘chain’. Some examination boards have trouble with this: they do it because of their sense of responsibility, and because “otherwise things will go wrong”. But it actually has the opposite effect, because it stops the organisation from developing further. One final (related) suggestion is that there should be as little monitoring as possible. Nobody likes supervision, or the “red pen”. The trick is to ensure adequate assurance throughout the chain. The professionals’ responsibilities must be returned to them, and they must receive adequate facilitative support from the faculty management. It is the task of the executive board and faculty management to effectively structure such assurance.’

Which of the above rules proves most difficult?

‘Acting in accordance with strictly defined roles has proven difficult, because tasks are often poorly defined and responsibilities are not covered effectively. This applies in particular to assessment committees or testing and assessment experts, faculty management and examination boards. We notice that we can cause confusion with questions such as: How would you define “assurance”? Who should structure it? Who is responsible for testing and assessment policy and the test programme? Who draws these up? Who manages the testing and assessment experts?’

The role and position of the assessment committee in relation to the examination board tend to spark a lot of controversy. In our opinion, testing and assessment experts should mainly support the examiners. They should also contribute to the development of testing and assessment policy, test programmes and other frameworks. Testing and assessment experts therefore play a supporting role, on behalf of the executive board or faculty management. The roles and responsibilities of the key bodies and employees are described in detail in our publication titled “Working together on the quality of testing in higher education” (Samenwerken aan toetskwaliteit in het hoger onderwijs).’

What is the impact of following the above rules?

‘We have already mentioned several effects, such as the fact that professionals can once again take responsibility. Strict adherence to detailed task descriptions is the >>



Els van Zijl
Senior consultant, Education and Research Office, Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences



Mieke Jaspers
Senior consultant, Education and Research Office, Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences

>> first step towards a quality-oriented culture. The greatest impact occurs when **Further Improvement**

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the executive board and examination boards realise that they can benefit one another, provided they stick to the same rules. In such cases, the examination board must have sufficient expertise and be clearly positioned as an independent body, while the faculty management retains responsibility for the quality of testing. The examination board is there to help the management identify the strengths and weaknesses of the test system, giving the management a body that is able to provide active feedback on the structure of the “test mechanism”.

Could you name some examples you have seen of clear improvement?

‘We worked with a programme where it had become commonplace for students to submit all complaints regarding tests directly to the examination board, who then felt obliged to respond to them all. Many resits and resubmissions were granted, but nothing improved. Only once the complaints were redirected to the responsible employees did anything change. Another example concerns a conflict that was brewing between the examination board and the faculty management. Members of the management felt that the examination board was handing them guidelines and expecting them to be implemented straight

away. Drawing up a joint plan based on a thorough analysis of the quality of testing resolved the issue.

Another common occurrence is for examination boards to check all tests. By once again making this component of the testing cycle the examiners’ responsibility (under the supervision of testing and assessment experts), quality improved noticeably and the professionals entered into dialogues on quality standards.’

Are these rules independent agreements, or do they assume a certain culture within an organisation?

‘They require a culture focused on development where people are allowed to make mistakes, and where the structure of the test system and collaboration are subject to evaluation. This is still quite rare.’

‘Who manages the testing and assessment experts? Who is responsible for testing quality? Tasks and responsibilities should be clearly defined’



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[Essay by Edith Hooge](#)

[Further Improvement*](#)

[Workshop Presentation](#)

Quality assurance: from regulations to understanding

Edith Hooge
(TIAS, Tilburg University)

Although the education system has a long history of regulations, there is also much support for deregulation: those working in education often express their dissatisfaction with all the rules. And it is certainly not only the government who makes rules: institutions also do this themselves, including examination boards. Why such an enormous urge to regulate? And is there another way? Edith Hooge, Professor of Boards and Governance in Education, provided a reflection on regulation by examination boards.

Examination boards direct their focus at the heart of education: testing and examination. In doing so, they often create regulations. But why? Because we feel uncomfortable when faced with inequality and differences. We want uniformity and standardisation, otherwise the results could be unintended. Plus, a lack of rules means less security: people must then make their own decisions. Rules provide comfort. Nevertheless, we regularly discover that regulations are not compatible with the nature of education, and that they usually have a detrimental effect.

Three families

Regulations are an instrument of policy. There are three families of policy instruments: in addition to the 'whips' (laws and regulations), there are the 'carrots' (financial incentives or sanctions) and the 'sermons' (persuading people and establishing frameworks). This last method is modern

and effective. Every morning, for example, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science tweets an example of quality education, influencing perceptions and ideas about quality education and creating a support base. But if you go too far, the sword will lose its edge: people will see through it. A variation on the three policy instruments can have powerful effects: instead of starting with regulations, start by generating a support base, and continue organising from there.

Examination boards still have much to learn in this area. The Further Improvement report showed that they are now concentrating mostly on matters related to processes, and little on the content of tests. This may be because it is not possible to regulate content – lecturers, after all, require professional freedom. But what does this say about quality assurance for the content of tests and examinations? Should the examination board not worry about this at all? How can the task of supervision be defined to avoid creating a body focused exclusively on processes?

A bureaucratic exercise?

Currently, regulations often play a key role in the supervisory activities of examination boards. These regulations can have varying effects. The frameworks, guidebooks and guidelines that govern the work of examiners and lecturers who create tests are sometimes very effective, and sometimes less so. Regulations may be accepted, but they can also elicit other behaviours: people may start negotiating and try to reach compromises, to evade regulations or to defy them. We call this 'gaming'.

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. To aid this process, examination boards, executive boards and examiners are advised to discuss how they wish to distribute the responsibilities and authorisations. This workshop presented some potential guidelines to use when doing so.

It is the task of the examination board to genuinely ensure the quality of tests and examinations, and to avoid turning things into a bureaucratic exercise. Two perspectives can help in this respect: 'from performance to mastery orientation', and combining hard and soft information processing. These perspectives can help examination boards to resist the urge to regulate, and to fulfil their responsibilities in other ways.

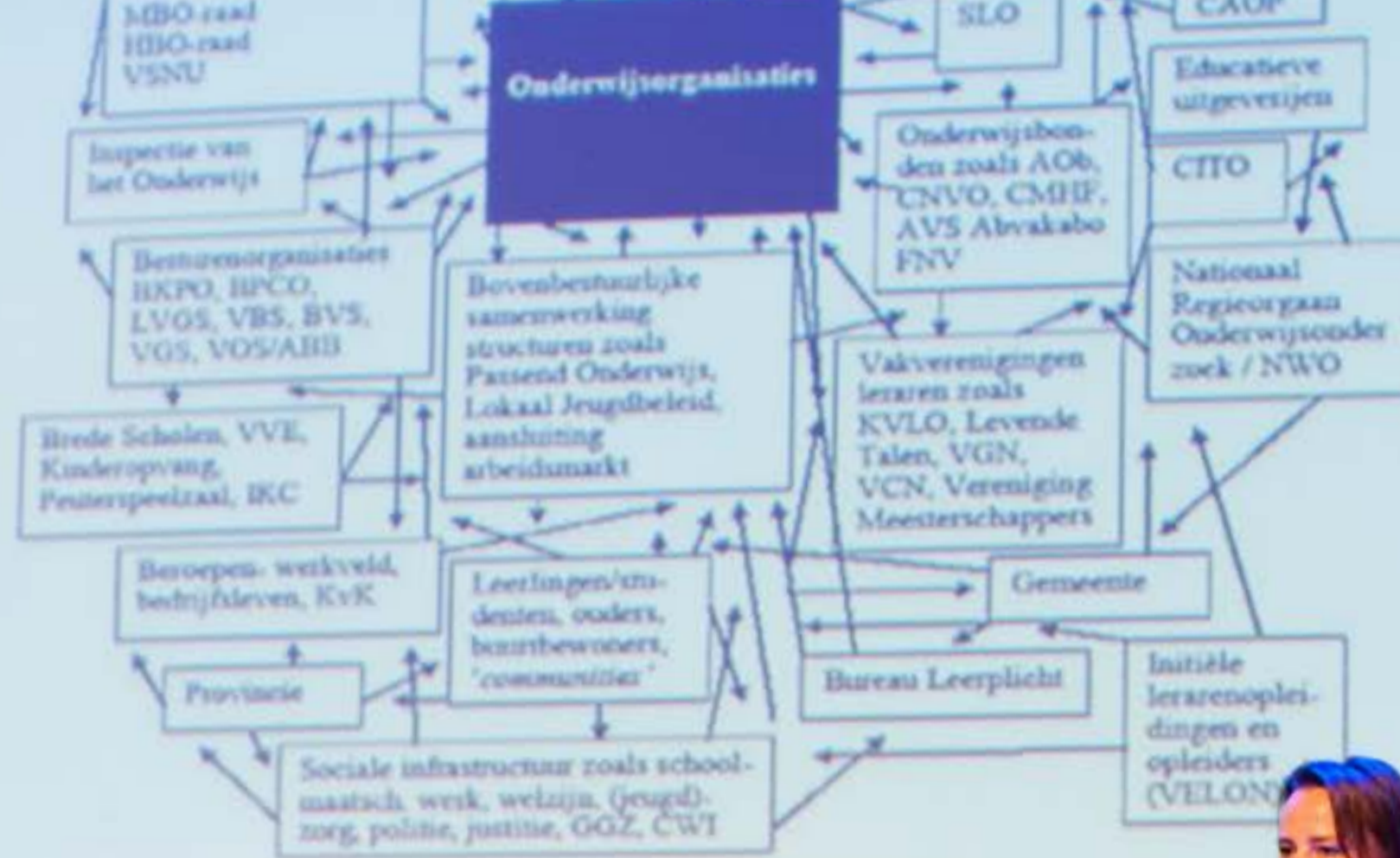
No recipe for education

Is it even possible to fully regulate education? No. The job still requires human input, and it is dangerous to just impose all sorts of rules and regulations. Baking a cake is easy: just use a recipe. But raising and educating children is more complex, and formulas, protocols and codes are not enough.

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[Essay by Edith Hooge](#)

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‘Examination boards can’t do everything from behind a desk’

Edith Hooge (TIAS, Tilburg University)

Can examination boards perform effectively without formulating guidelines for examiners?

‘Examination boards are there to ensure high-quality tests and examination. Simply establishing regulations is not enough: encouraging other parties to collaborate and to exchange information to promote the creation of quality examinations is a major part of this process. Examination boards therefore shouldn’t just spew out regulations, but should allow for the professional freedom of teaching staff. It is the job of examination boards to verify whether the quality of testing is sufficient, however.’

You state that regulation can go too far, turning quality assurance into a bureaucratic exercise. How can examination boards avoid this?

‘It takes discipline. Examination boards must not give in to regulation as a knee-jerk reaction, but should ask themselves whether any new regulations are really necessary, or whether the situation requires a different approach. The board must also monitor the actual effects of measures and regulations, and check to see whether they are feasible in practice. This costs extra time and energy, because people need to maintain contact and enter into discussions with lecturers, faculty managers and students. Nobody can do that from behind a desk. It also helps if members of the examination board have subject-related expertise.’

‘Don’t just spew out regulations, but allow for the professional freedom of teaching staff’



Edith Hooge
Professor of Boards and Governance in Education, TIAS, Tilburg University

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[LSVb study](#)

The examination board through the eyes of a student



Klaasjan Boon (LSVb)

Students are at the heart of the work performed by examination boards. But how do students view the examination boards? What do they know about the boards' work, and how do they regard it? In December 2014 the Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb) published a study on the role of examination boards in higher education. The study showed that students' perceptions of examination boards do not always correspond to reality. Klaasjan Boon, a member of the LSVb Executive Board, highlighted the problem areas.

Boon discussed three areas where examination boards can make drastic improvements, as shown by the LSVb study:

- **Transparency**
It is often unclear to students exactly what goes on in the examination board, and why certain decisions are made. Students are also unaware of who the board members are.
- **Independence**
Students who are familiar with the examination board notice that lecturers make decisions regarding their own subjects. What they do not see, however, is that lecturers virtually always leave the meeting whenever their own subjects are discussed, giving students the impression that examination boards do not always act fully independently.

- **Precision**
Many students are uncertain about deadlines or response times, creating the impression that examination boards are careless whenever they announce a decision later than expected.

The workshop participants continued by thinking of innovative solutions to the above-mentioned problems, and exchanged ideas and good practices for each of the areas highlighted by Boon (see box on next page). Of course there is no 'cure-all' that can prevent or solve every problem, and a combination of several solutions is desirable. One challenge for examination boards is to think about what they themselves could improve with regard to these areas, and to gain inspiration from the suggestions in the box overleaf.

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In the inquiry by the Inspectorate, 94% of examination boards state that students are informed about the examination board's tasks, authorisations and procedures. Still, examination boards often exhibit limited transparency, and the Dutch National Union of Students (LSVb) and the Dutch National Student Association (ISO) believe that students are often underinformed. The LSVb conducted its own study on the subject, and this workshop covered the topic from a student perspective.

'Many students are uncertain about deadlines, creating the impression that examination boards are careless'

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LSVb study

GOOD PRACTICES AND TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

What can examination boards do to improve their transparency, independence and precision in order to more effectively meet the needs of students?

The suggestions by workshop participants for each category are summarised and presented below.

Transparency

- If a student sends a request to the examination board that does not belong there, the board itself could forward it to the correct body and inform the student of what has happened. This way, students are prevented from feeling as though they are being given the run-around.
- The examination board could introduce itself to the students at the start of the study programme. Although they could do so the start of the year, this is a time when students are already inundated with information. The second study period is therefore probably a better idea.
- By asking students about their experiences/satisfaction following contact with the examination board, the board demonstrates its concern and also receives information on possible improvement areas.
- Attending information days and events will enable the examination board to establish a presence among future students as an important decision-making body.
- Holding a (possibly weekly) walk-in office hour will increase the examination board's visibility and give it a human face, also making it more accessible and personal.
- The examination board could draw up a set of standing orders, so that students know which procedures and regulations are used.

Independence

- The examination board could take on a student as an (acting) member, in order to ensure independence and include a student perspective.
- Periodic consultation between the examination board and the programme committee would not only promote independence, but would also benefit the mutual exchange of information and the coordination of tasks and activities.
- Placing an FAQ on the faculty website would enable the examination board to respond to common questions regarding its independence, tasks and authorisations.
- In addition to an FAQ, the decision tree could also be put on the website to inform students of which types of questions the examination board will handle, and how they are dealt with.
- Appointing an external member would improve the board's independent image.
- Clearly stating the available appeal options at the end of each decision gives students an honest and independent impression of the examination board.

Precision

- Explaining all of the considerations when issuing a decision will inform students of why their request has been granted or declined. When doing so, it is important to remain brief and succinct, so as not to burden students with too much text.
- Creating a concise, clear brochure outlining the examination board's tasks and authorisations will raise student awareness of the examination board and (better) inform them of deadlines and response times.
- Offering to explain a decision face-to-face will enable examination boards to inform students of the relevant considerations in a personal fashion..
- Informing students via email instead of by post will speed up contact.
- If the examination board maintains effective contact with academic counsellors, clearly coordinating tasks and authorisations with them, students will be referred less often to the examination board for matters that they should take elsewhere.

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The examination board as a professional community

John Huizinga (TIAS, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences) and Frans de Vijlder (HAN University of Applied Sciences)

Examination boards bear a major responsibility, which has only increased since the introduction of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act. Examination boards are now charged with the task of ensuring the quality of interim and final examinations much more explicitly than before. How can they fulfil this responsibility, and what is their relationship with the executive board and faculty management? John Huizinga and Frans de Vijlder considered these aspects.

The objective of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act is to enable higher education examination boards to properly fulfil their responsibilities using what is called ‘professionals governance’. The formation of networks and mutual exchange of knowledge are key aspects of this approach. The search for the right way for examination boards to fulfil their role is a cyclical learning process, said Huizinga and De Vijlder.

They also discussed the development of digital research networks that can contribute to the emergence of a professional community, which performs its duties based on a pool of knowledge that has been academically validated to the greatest extent possible. Knowledge circulation is crucial in this respect.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. The Inspectorate also advises sharing knowledge via national networks. This workshop looked at these two matters.



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‘I work at the Dutch National Student Association (ISO). Since there is so much talk about students here, it’s nice for there to be a few of us around. Today the overwhelming focus is on examination boards, but it’s great to be here and to make it clear that the students mustn’t be forgotten. Right now, I myself am working on a study concentrating on testing, and on feedback in particular. Examination boards already devote a lot of thought to testing and committees, but the feedback they receive from students could be put to better use. I hope to put forward that message today. I want to sound the students’ trumpet, and see the boards respond by saying that they want to do more with student feedback.’

Lisanne van Kessel

Project officer, Dutch National Student Association (ISO)

‘Examination boards are in a state of flux right now, so I’m hoping to gather some information on new developments. Interacting with others, gaining inspiration and networking are also on my list of important things to do. My main interest lies with ensuring the quality of examiners, also as part of the recent developments in basic and senior examination qualifications (BKE and SKE). There was a nice discussion at the Education Café about the core duties of examination boards – it’s good to hear that there are others who also wrestle with the same issues, such as students studying abroad.’

Bertus Schokker

Examination Board member, Stenden University of Applied Sciences



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[Examination board: background](#)

[Rescinding appointments](#)

[Interview with Blomen, et al.](#)

Tests, examination and the role of examination boards in higher education accreditation

Wienke Blomen, Rob Stapert and Frank Hendriks (Hobéon)

The role of testing and examination in the accreditation of higher-education programmes has clearly become more prominent. But what exactly are inspection panels looking for in the performance of an examination board? This workshop run by Hobéon revealed that evaluations concentrate primarily on proportionality and attention to the examination board's stage of development.

An inspection will of course look at the formal position occupied by examination boards, and at the support they receive: is the board properly equipped to fulfil its role effectively? In addition to discussions with the examination board, the management, teaching staff and students, the panel will also perform its evaluation using relevant underlying documentation, such as annual plans and reports. The panel will then investigate whether formal matters and duties within the examination board are finalised and in order.

In an accreditation inspection, however, the examination board's 'watchful eye' is the key focus. Hobéon's development-oriented approach takes this into consideration. In such cases, the inspection panel looks at how the examination board organises the quality assurance of examinations (testing and assessment), with a clear emphasis on whether the board is aware of its own stage of development. Does it know what is going well, and what it could (or should) do better?

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate notes that decisions by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and the underlying observations from inspection reports correspond to the results of the inquiry. Nearly all faculties currently undergoing a recovery process report problems with the examination board. This workshop outlined how inspection panels from Hobéon view the performance of examination boards.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

The discussion between an inspection panel and an examination board can be reduced to three key questions:

- What has the examination board done over the previous year/until now to improve the quality of interim and final examinations (testing and assessment)? In other words: what guidelines and instructions have been issued to clearly define the intended quality?
- What has the examination board done over the past year to gain a clear idea of the actual quality of the structure and implementation, and what was the result? And subsequently: what proposals has the examination board made for further development or improvement?
- Where will the examination board be in 2016? What is on the agenda for the year ahead, and what are the priorities?

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Article: Van der Lei
External Validation Report
Responsible testing
Workshop handout*

How can institutions work on the testing and assessment competence of their examiners?

Remko van der Lei and Brenda Aalders (Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen)

In response to the External Validation Report, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) has drawn up a schedule of requirements describing the basic learning outcomes for examiners, which are attested via the Basic Examination Qualification (Basiskwalificatie examineren, or BKE). Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen tests its examiners for the BKE using a portfolio and a criterion-based interview. In this practical session, Remko van der Lei and Brenda Aalders invited participants to contribute their ideas regarding this method of ensuring the quality of tests.

Van der Lei and Aalders first asked the participants a few questions regarding testing and assessment competence, the quality of examiners and the potential role of the BKE in improving the quality of tests. In pairs, the participants shared their knowledge and experiences on these subjects (see box). Van der Lei and Aalders then used the group's feedback to establish connections with the theoretical framework of the test quality pyramid within educational organisations (see handout). The old adage of 'every test is only as strong as its weakest link' applies to both the pyramid and the associated testing cycle.

Externally validated BKE programmes

The workshop facilitators then discussed Hanze University's experiences with the Basic Examination Qualification (BKE). Hanze is the only university of applied sciences with an externally validated BKE programme (by Fontys and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences) and tests all of its 1600 examiners. BKE certification is required for all assessment committee and examination board

members. The programme is structured as follows: The examiners all start with one of their own exams. They receive a workbook containing an empty portfolio, a bibliography and a checklist which they must use to collate all of the documentation relevant to the creation of the test. They study the literature and reflect on their test, then attend a criterion-based interview on their portfolio, which interview is evaluated.

According to Van der Lei and Aalders, BKE certification is designed to improve the basic standard of examiners across the entire testing spectrum, making it a relevant addition to the palette of professional activities among (even experienced) lecturer-examiners in higher education. Examiners must demonstrate their testing and assessment competence at all stages of the testing cycle. The advent of the BKE and its senior equivalent (the SKE) also has a positive impact on assessment committees, changing their role from overseer to discussion partner.

Since the BKE programme's inception at Hanze University, student satisfaction regarding testing has increased. Lecturers who have obtained their BKE certification are also pleased with the results, and a number of assessment committee and examination board members have now also obtained their SKE.

Flywheel effect

The workshop participants were curious about the organisation's response to the implementation of the BKE programme. They themselves regularly encounter resistance, e.g. from their more senior colleagues who, with all their experience, fail to see the need for a BKE. Van der Lei and Aalders reported that, at Hanze University, the training programme had created a kind of flywheel effect. Plenty of energy was invested in the BKE programme at the outset. As more and more lecturers completed the programme and

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate stresses the importance of testing and assessment expertise. Examiners require further professional development. In this workshop, Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen demonstrates its own approach to professional development.

WHAT IS TESTING AND ASSESSMENT COMPETENCE ALL ABOUT?

According to the participants, testing and assessment expertise involves:

- knowledge of the institution's testing and assessment policy;
- an awareness of the position of the test within the larger testing and assessment plan;
- knowledge of forms of testing and the ability to apply them correctly and at the right time (e.g. when to use formative/summative tests);
- relevant subject knowledge;
- selectiveness of the test (will those who do not understand actually fail?);
- a precise formulation of learning objectives as a basis for the test;
- consistency between teaching and testing;
- tests that are internally consistent, contain clear questions and are worded effectively;
- intersubjectivity in the creation and evaluation of tests;
- tests that are not (or not only) used as a means to 'sort the wheat from the chaff', but can also be used as a means of providing feedback and enhancing learning.

shared their enthusiasm, people's openness increased, along with mutual discussion about testing issues, and the willingness and eagerness among others to obtain the qualification too.

If you are interested in the BKE/SKE programme at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, please contact Remko van der Lei: r.r.van.der.lei@pl.hanze.nl.

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**Cito Calibrations
Guide**

Calibration of final assignments in higher education

Marlies van Beek (Cito)

Peer review can help promote the professional development of examiners. One form of peer review is the ‘calibration session’, used in the assessment of final assignments or theses in order to increase the reliability of assessment. During the workshop, Marlies van Beek, trainer/consultant at Cito, showed what a calibration session entails.

Calibration addresses various questions. What do the assessment criteria actually mean? When is a satisfactory/unsatisfactory mark awarded for each criterion? What explanation (if any) is required for each criterion? Van Beek presented an exercise to show how a calibration session can be used to answer these questions. A [guide to calibration](#) sessions has been included in the final report by the Protocol expert group, which conducted research into a joint protocol for the assessment of final/other assignments.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

In its report, the Inspectorate looks at examination boards’ responsibility to ensure the quality of examinations. This responsibility also involves further professional development among examiners. This workshop discussed one specific form of development: calibration sessions.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A CALIBRATION SESSION?

One way to organise a calibration session is as follows:

1. Examiners use the assessment model to assess a final assignment or thesis independently of one another.
2. During the first meeting, the examiners discuss the assessments, facilitated by a testing and assessment expert. Where do the similarities lie, and what are the differences? Using this analysis the group then jointly develops a communal reference framework, improving the assessment form/process where necessary. The examiners then independently assess another final assignment or thesis, using the improved form/process.
3. Once these assessments have been analysed via a report, an evaluation session is held.



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[Further Improvement*](#)

*English translation

The interpretation of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) in relation to examination boards

Patrick Leushuis and Trees Ruijgrok (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, OCW)

The position of examination boards in the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) was redefined in 2010. However, examination boards are not always clear on how they should interpret the statutory provisions. Patrick Leushuis and Trees Ruijgrok, both senior policy officers at the Higher Education and Study Financing department of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), discussed several interpretation issues with the participants in this workshop. They also looked at two other important matters concerning examination boards: the pilots in programme flexibility, and – as a logical extension thereof – the experiments in demand-based financing.

The interpretation of the Higher Education and Research Act

The *Further Improvement** report deals with several issues related to the interpretation of statutory provisions. The first part of the workshop was devoted to these issues.

Can an examiner's appointment be revoked?

The participants made short work of the first question: 'Can an examiner's appointment be revoked if they fail to perform adequately?' The answer is already included in the *Further Improvement* report: yes, examination boards are authorised to do so. However, examiners must first be given the chance to improve their performance.

Can examinations be declared invalid?

One question requiring more time was that of whether the examination board may

declare an examination invalid. It is permissible, said Ruijgrok, if fraud or irregularities are discovered in the work of one or more students. But as luck would have it, one of the attendees had just come from a workshop where the same question had been asked, and the answer was 'no'. Discussion ensued, and it quickly became clear that the interpretation depends on the specific circumstances of the case. The examination board may declare an examination invalid, but cannot alter any grades awarded by the examiners. The tasks of examination assessment and grading are the examiner's responsibility under the WHW, and no provisions in the Teaching and Examination Regulations may deviate from this principle.

Own investigation?

A third question was raised as follows: 'What is the meaning of the WHW regulation that authorises the examination board to conduct its own independent investigation following all examinations?' This regulation does not pertain to an investigation into the quality of examinations, Ruijgrok explained, but rather to students' knowledge, understanding and skills. These types of investigations must be listed in the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) as part of the examination. All students are subject to such an investigation, which must take the same form for each student. Because it is a final examination and not an interim examination, exemptions are not permitted.

Unanimity is not always possible

The attendees certainly gave the ministry's representatives a run for their money: all manner of exceptions were brought up that push the existing frameworks and >>

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

The report shows that examination boards are currently struggling to interpret some of the statutory provisions. A common view of the right interpretation is desirable, and the Inspectorate also outlines how new developments (such as the plans to make higher education more flexible) are increasing the need for further improvement among examination boards. This workshop focused on both of these topics.

'The examination board may declare an examination invalid, but cannot alter any grades awarded'

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*English translation

‘Examination is, and will remain, a job done by

>> regulations to the limit. For example: a student was supposed to have been awarded a score of 1 for a certain subject, but received a 6 due to a computer error. This was not discovered until nine months later. What to do? What is clear is that examination is, and will remain, a job done by human beings, Ruijgrok concluded. It is certainly not always possible to provide an unambiguous answer to all questions that may arise.

Flexibility pilots

Part 2 of the workshop was devoted to the pilots for flexibility in adult higher education and experiments in demand-based financing. The flexibility pilots are intended to create opportunities for making the design of part-time and work-study programmes more flexible and attractive. Faculties can create tailored study paths by working with units comprising learning outcomes rather than with fixed units of teaching, and by including validation of students’ prior knowledge and skills so that the paths can be shortened. Using the workplace as a learning site and intensifying the use of online teaching methods allows more efficient access to study programmes by adults.

The responses clearly reflected a great need to make education more flexible, and many representatives from universities of applied sciences expressed their eagerness to take part in the pilots. It was also pointed out that these developments are not only important to adults, but to all students in higher education. In the interview on the following page, Leushuis explains how increased flexibility will

impact examination boards.

Experiments in demand-based financing

In the experiments in demand-based financing, funding is provided by means of vouchers which students can exchange for participation in accredited study programmes (or components thereof) at either public or private institutions. The experiments apply to selected programmes in the engineering, healthcare and welfare sectors, which may recruit and enrol participants for phased, modular participation in accredited programmes. The stipulations regarding a fixed campus are relaxed, giving institutions the freedom to conduct teaching activities on location.



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*English translation

‘Learn from each other, seek each other out, ask each other questions’

Interview with Patrick Leushuis (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, OCW)

The learning track-independent assessment currently being trialled in the pilots is a major innovation. What will this mean for examination boards?
‘The flexibility pilots are abandoning the one-size-fits-all approach based on a single curriculum that applies equally to everybody. A diverse range of flexible learning pathways can exist within the same study programme. Nevertheless, there must still be a guarantee that all of the various learning tracks lead to comparable learning outcomes, and that every diploma is worth what it says it is: the achievement of the exit qualifications, in terms of both content and standards. This is why we apply an assessment method that is independent of any learning track: the same criteria apply to everybody, regardless of the path they take. Examination boards will need to develop guidelines that match both the specific character of learning track-independent assessment and the associated customary testing and assessment methods. Then they will need to make sure these are properly monitored.’

How will this be implemented in practice?

‘During the workshop, examples were cited such as progressive testing, portfolio assessments and assessment centres, which a number of institutions already have experience with. The actual formulation of the learning outcomes will be a crucial success factor, and will also have an impact on the design of the learning track-independent assessment. It would therefore seem obvious to involve examination boards in the creation of guidelines and frameworks for the formulation and adoption of the various units and learning outcomes.’

Another future change involves the recognition of students’ prior learning outside the faculty. What role will examination boards play here?
‘Many working adults have already gained relevant knowledge, understanding and skills as part of their jobs, or through various training courses. We want these results to be recognised and converted into course credits, so that study pathways can be designed to avoid teaching people things they already know. Recognising the relevant results requires the application of proper validation procedures and instruments, based on the formulated learning outcomes of the study programme. Next, examination boards must be able to justify any decision to award course credits (or even diplomas) to candidates who demonstrably meet all of the requirements at exit level. Such decisions must be well-founded and documented so that the process is transparent and traceable, and to ensure accountability on the part of examination boards.’

How can examination boards adapt to the new conditions?

‘The flexibility pilots will be supported and monitored by the Inspectorate, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Possible resources include a guidebook containing guidelines, tips, effective examples, etc. for working with learning outcomes, learning track-independent assessment, recognition of prior learning and quality assurance in work-study programmes. Events facilitating knowledge exchange will also be organised, which is also general good advice: learn from each other, seek each other out, visit other institutions and faculties that already



Patrick Leushuis
Directorate of Higher Education and Study Finance Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

‘Discuss with your fellows what works and what doesn’t’

have relevant experience. Identify good practices, discuss with your fellows what works and what doesn’t, and don’t be afraid to ask questions whenever you encounter dilemmas and issues in development or implementation. Bring up matters that you think you will benefit from discussion with members of staff at other institutions – not just examination boards, but anybody within the organisation involved with the flexibility pilots.’

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The examination board in the legal precedents of the Higher Education Appeals Tribunal

Willem Beijk, Jan Nijenhof and Ben Olivier (Higher Education Appeals Tribunal, CBHO)

So what does the law actually say about fraud? How should examination boards go about claims for compensation? What are the regulations governing the composition of the examination board? In this workshop, the Higher Education Appeals Tribunal (CBHO) used the key articles pertaining to examination boards in the Higher Education and Research Act to clarify current legal precedents.

Key topics discussed during the workshop included the composition of examination boards, the examination board as a party to legal proceedings, and fraud and how it is dealt with by examination boards. Informal complaints procedures were also discussed: is this practice desirable or not? The workshop facilitators also looked at the procedure for compensation.

A [document](#) is available with legal precedent information for examination boards, covering the following topics:

1. The examination board as a supervisory body
2. The examination board and examiners
3. The examination board and exemptions
4. The examination board and its decisions
5. The examination board and informal appeals/complaints procedures
6. The examination board and settling out of court
7. The examination board and fraud issues
8. The examination board and the Iudicium Abeundi ('departure order', Higher Education and Research Act, Section 7.42a)
9. The examination board as the implementing body of the BNSA
10. The examination board as a party to legal proceedings
11. The periodic penalty payment procedure
12. Compensation procedure (General Administrative Law Act (Awb), Section 8:88 et seq.)

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'
Examination boards are currently struggling to interpret some statutory provisions. Students are entitled to appeal to the Higher Education Appeals Tribunal against decisions taken by examination boards, and it is important for examination boards to be aware of the relevant legal precedents. That was the subject of this workshop.

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Valid and reliable testing in art education

Ton Lamers, Marcel Doorduyn and Jackelien ter Burg (ArteZ)
René de Klein and Anton Negers (Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences)
Jan Wirken (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences)

Examination procedures in art education differ from those at other faculties in a number of ways. Objective criteria can be elusive in the arts, and in assessments, the feedback is often equally as important as the grade itself. Arts programmes also work a lot with external assessors, far from all of whom have teaching qualifications. So how do arts programmes ensure valid and reliable testing?

Three institutions shared their experiences in four areas.

Area 1: Guaranteeing exit levels (ArteZ) In The Higher Education and Research Act states that examination boards must use objective and expert methods to verify whether students fulfil the requirements set out in the Teaching and Examination Regulations with regard to knowledge, understanding and skills. This task has also been included in the new accreditation framework of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). In addition to the required system checks, this process demands a subject-based assessment. In the arts, external assessors are often used for this purpose, i.e. professionals who are aware of the demands placed on artists and art educators in the field. It is also important for teaching staff to cultivate a >>

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate looks at examination boards' responsibility to ensure the quality of examinations, and recommends that the boards engage in cross-institutional sharing of good practices. That is exactly what examination boards at institutions of art education did during these two workshops.



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‘The examination board can play a role in assuring feedback quality’

>> shared interpretation of the exit levels stipulated by the assessment criteria..

Area 2: Assessment systems (Zuyd)

The quality of tests is largely dependent on the test system used. Within any programme, the testing and assessment policy, programme and instruments must all be mutually coordinated. A proper testing system will fulfil all requirements pertaining to validity, reliability and transparency. Describing and applying the right testing criteria is not easy for many artistic disciplines, however, nor is it a simple matter to ensure quality throughout the entire system, which is the examination board’s job. In addition to assessing students, it is important therefore to also continually monitor the quality of tests.

Area 3: Quality of examiners (Fontys)

The Act states that the examination board must appoint one or more examiners per test. These may be experts external to the institution. Criteria such as subject and testing and assessment expertise, experience and quality are key in determining such appointments. Art education makes frequent use both of teaching staff without any teaching qualifications, and of external examiners. The appointment of examiners is one of the examination board’s discretionary powers, and one that even supersedes the authorisations of the executive board regarding personnel policy. This means that the examination board’s recommendations to the institution also impact the faculty’s recruitment & selection and professional development policies.

Area 4: Finalising assessments (ArtEZ)

Performance feedback is essential to the further development of all students in the arts. The way in which assessments (i.e. grades) are reached must also be made adequately clear to both students and other parties. The proper justification of an assessment is an art in itself. Peer review instruments are a useful means of improving feedback, and the examination board can play a role in assuring feedback quality.

[A detailed report from the workshop is included below.](#)



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‘We must find language that we can use to express what it is we do’

Interview with Ton Lamers (ArtEZ), Marcel Doorduyn (ArtEZ), Anton Neggers (Fontys Universities of Applied Sciences) and Jan Wirken (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences)

What was it like to meet and talk like this?

Ton Lamers: ‘We reached agreement quite quickly, the topics we discussed were very familiar to everyone. We all felt we were colleagues!’

Anton Neggers: ‘We had an animated discussion in which everybody shared their opinions. We are all coming from the same place, and realise that cooperation is necessary. Art institutions often think they are unique, but talking to each other reveals that we all face the same challenges.’

Marcel Doorduyn: ‘This session has helped us realise that we’re all beating the same drum. There are more similarities than differences.’

What was your most important message?
Neggers: ‘One participant made a very important observation: that art educators must leave their egos at home during assessments. Instead of giving your opinion as an individual, you need to cooperate and operate within the context of the institution.’

Doorduyn: ‘I believe it’s very important for us all to collaborate and learn from each other, and to find language that we can use to express what it is we do.’

Jan Wirken: ‘It should be viewed as an initial step in the collaboration among examination boards in the arts, which is designed to encourage mutual inspiration and transparency.’



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‘We ask students to write a final project proposal, and formulate their own criteria outlining what it is they want to achieve. In addition to the general requirements, these personal criteria are also taken into account during assessment. After all, students themselves should also state the level they want to attain.’

Robert von der Nahmer
Chairman of the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design examination board

‘External experts may not assess final examinations for more than two years. This is to retain the external experts’ fresh perspective, and to prevent affiliations from becoming too strong.’

Cornelia Steenmeijer
Member of the Minerva Academy central examination board, Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen



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Toetsen, niet minder maar anders

Lex Jansen (handicap + studie Expertise Centre)

The studies of around 10% of all students in higher education are affected by a functional disability or chronic illness such as dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, a disorder on the autism spectrum, or Crohn's disease. Statutory provisions exist that entitle these students to adapted assessment, and it is the examination board's job to make sure it is provided. Such adaptations can involve both the test format and the conditions under which it is completed. Lex Jansen showed how forms of testing can be adapted without compromising reliability or validity.

Many students with a functional disability or chronic illness experience difficulty with the testing prescribed by study programmes. This is not because they lack the required knowledge or skills: rather, it is due to the conditions of, or the form taken by, the test itself. To illustrate the problem, Jansen showed a short film commissioned

by the handicap + studie Expertise Centre in which Casper, a student with Asperger syndrome, explains his difficulty with interpreting multiple-choice questions.

The Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act (WGBH/CZ) states that students with functional disabilities or chronic illnesses are entitled to adaptations. Adapted conditions are already commonplace: students may sometimes sit 'separately', or are given more time to complete a test. Adaptations to form, however, are still sporadic, for fear of putting the reliability or validity of the test at risk. Such fears are unfounded, said Jansen: examination boards can use the expertise centre's reference model to verify whether an alternative test is equivalent, or whether quality has been sacrificed. The model also offers suggestions on the admission and implementation processes for alternative testing within education institutions.

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'
In its report, the Inspectorate looks at examination boards' responsibility to issue decisions on individual students. The task of adapting tests for students with functional disabilities falls under this responsibility, but is often very time-consuming. During this workshop, the handicap + studie Expertise Centre presented a reference model to assist in this process.

'Adaptations to the form of a test are sporadic, for fear of putting its reliability at risk. This fear is unfounded'

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[Assessment Reference Model](#)

[Article: Own Assessment](#)

[Article: Deafness](#)

[Article: Dyslexia](#)

[Video: Casper](#)

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Fraud: from practice to policy

Ludo van Meeuwen (Eindhoven University of Technology) and Arie de Wild (Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences)

It is the job of examination boards to ensure the quality of testing, which entails a shared responsibility for the prevention of fraud. But how can instances of fraud be detected, and how can fraud be prevented in the first place? Testing and assessment adviser Ludo van Meeuwen from Eindhoven University of Technology and Professor of Behavioural Economics Arie de Wild from Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences offered some footholds for a comprehensive anti-fraud policy. They also presented a tool that examination boards can use to reveal hidden data pertaining to fraud.

Both Meeuwen and De Wild recently investigated the subject of fraud. Eindhoven University of Technology has summarised its fraud policy in a new document outlining a comprehensive approach, and in 2014 Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences used a new research method to reveal hidden fraud data. The aim of both institutions is to remain in control with regard to integrity and awarding diplomas.

Serious fraud: what is it, and why do people commit it?

First of all, it is important to create a clear definition of what serious fraud actually is. Some examples mentioned during the workshop include intentional fraud, identity fraud, full plagiarism, forging research data, fraud during inspection of exam papers, and repeated fraud. The next important question was: why do students commit fraud? The

workshop concluded that there are three main causes: study or other pressures, the presence of an opportunity, and rationalisation. Because study pressure is due mostly to external factors and therefore difficult to impact via fraud policy, the workshop concentrated on the latter two reasons. So what can examination boards do to limit rationalisation and the opportunities for fraud?

Comprehensive fraud policy

Van Meeuwen distinguished four important steps in the structuring of comprehensive fraud policy: information, prevention, detection and sanctions (see box). Examination boards will work optimally within their capacity by effecting all four anti-fraud measures, said Van Meeuwen. If there is no initiative from elsewhere in the hierarchy, or if fraud prevention policy is outdated, the examination board must act on its own initiative.

One aspect of fraud policy to keep in mind is that lecturers themselves can also contribute to fraud. There are cases, for example, of lecturers who reveal the exact content of an examination in advance, who neglect to monitor plagiarism, or who issue grades for work not completed. There are also stories of sleeping invigilators in circulation. Potential solutions to these problems include spot-checks by examination boards at examinations, an extra invigilator whose job it is to monitor the invigilators, and digital exam submission to enable instant plagiarism checks.

Hidden data

The [Further Improvement*](#) report points out the peculiarity of the fact that sometimes only very few cases of fraud, if any, are detected among large numbers of students.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

The report states that all examination boards impose sanctions in instances of fraud. Anti-fraud measures are often quite limited, however, giving rise to the risk that fraud may not always be discovered (or may be discovered too late). During this workshop, two education institutions demonstrated what they do to remain in control in this respect, and the role played by the examination board.

However, this does not mean that no fraud is taking place. For this reason, said Arie de Wild, it is important for examination boards to unearth the ‘hidden data’ pertaining to fraud. But how? De Wild outlined a pragmatic approach.

As opposed to the executive board, the management and teaching staff, students are often already aware of the hidden facts regarding fraud. Informal discussions among students can help to reveal this information. Circumvent the hierarchy, create a trusted atmosphere and avoid immediate documentation – chatting and taking minutes afterwards works better. If the atmosphere is right, you can then start to ask questions to try to get to the bottom of the situation. Don’t enquire about fraud directly, but ask general questions such as: ‘What are your concerns about our institution?’ or ‘What would you be ashamed of if it ever came to light?’ If there are instances of fraud within an institution, some students will report cases voluntarily. In this context, it is important to remain sincere in your dealings with people. The method requires that you constantly maintain a critical view of permissible ways to use the data collected. >>

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>> Anti-fraud tool

Examination boards must act according to a realistic view of fraud practices within their institution. This [anti-fraud tool](#) can help examination boards to gain insight into these practices, and to help fulfil their anti-fraud responsibilities.

THE FOUR STEPS TOWARDS COMPREHENSIVE FRAUD POLICY

1. Inform students properly about what is permitted – this will make it more difficult for them to justify fraud afterwards. This step primarily targets the ‘rationalisation’ motivator. Advise students (particularly at research universities) that fraud is unacceptable in their studies: future scholars, after all, are expected to treat confidential information in a reliable fashion.
2. Prevent fraud. For example, if two students are known for copying each other’s work, they should be separated. Make fraud more difficult by increasing the likelihood of exposure. This step reduces the opportunities for fraud.
3. Detect fraud. For example, ensure professional supervision during examinations, so that it is clear precisely which students are cheating. The role of invigilators is important in this respect.
4. Impose sanctions on the culprits, making sure to keep closely to the applicable procedures. Aim for uniform sanctions.

‘The main causes of fraud are study pressures, the presence of an opportunity, and rationalisation’

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[BFL Annual report template](#)

[BFL Examination Boards](#)

[BFL Assessment Committees](#)

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The examination board, the management and the executive board: A ‘dynamic’ relationship

Jan Wiss (Inholland)

Examination boards must be able to fulfil their role from a position of independence. In practice, they encounter a number of problems that can be attributed in part to their relationships with the executive board and the management. Legal Affairs Manager Jan Wiss from Inholland University of Applied Sciences outlined the problems, and also went in search of possible solutions with members of examination boards.

The Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) prescribes a position of independence for examination boards, from which to guarantee the value of a higher-education diploma. At the same time, the boards themselves are also part of the organisation and maintain relationships with the management and the executive board. These relationships impose other responsibilities that are sometimes at odds with the board’s independent position. During the workshop several examination board members confirmed that these relationships are not always ideal, and that the various interests can create tensions. The important thing is for managers and examination boards not to lose sight of the greater good – the value of the diploma – even when relationships are strained.

Inadequate facilitative support

A second grievance, and one that examination boards have been airing for years, is the lack of adequate facilitative support for their members. Both the minister and the Inspectorate confirm this once again in *Further Improvement**, pointing to the institutions as the responsible parties. The institutions have other priorities, however, meaning that the issue of support remains unresolved. As a consequence, the members – whose tasks are often combined with demanding teaching duties – frequently leave their work for the examination board by the wayside, further increasing the risks.

The workshop participants suggested explicit documentation of support standards for institutions (hours allocated for the chairman, secretary and examination board members), who must then incorporate those standards into support regulations. In addition, they suggested that each institution should have several employees dedicated entirely to working in and for examination boards. Based on these roles, these people could also serve as external members of other examination boards within the institution. Support should also be adequate for these purposes, and is perhaps a suitable issue for the political agenda.

RELEVANCE TO ‘FURTHER IMPROVEMENT’

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. In practice, the relationship between the examination board and the executive board/management can be a complicating factor. This workshop looked at the tensions and problems that can arise in relation to the examination board’s position within the institution.

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[Article: Frans de Vijlder](#)

Dilemmas in the work of examination board members

Frans de Vijlder (HAN)

Examination boards bear a major responsibility, since the introduction of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act, the job of examination boards to ensure the quality of interim and final examinations has been much more explicit than before. How can they fulfil this responsibility, and what is their relationship with the executive board and faculty management? What problems do they encounter in practice? Professor of Good Governance and Innovation Dynamics Frans de Vijlder summarised these dilemmas.

The objective of the Improved Governance (Higher Education) Act is to enable higher education examination boards to properly fulfil their responsibilities using what is called 'professionals governance'. The formation of networks and exchange of knowledge are key aspects in this approach. The search for the right way for examination boards to fulfil their role is a cyclical learning process, said De Vijlder. Knowledge circulation is crucial in this respect.

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate advises all parties to jointly decide on a clear and transparent position for examination boards within the context of their institutions. This sometimes proves difficult in practice, however. This workshop looked at the dilemmas faced by examination boards.



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‘Although networking is probably my main goal today, I’d also like to hear the latest news and set priorities for our examination board. What is the current national standard? What are the issues? I want to see how our board is doing. To me, the most important thing is to find out how my fellow board members from all universities organise their guidelines for structuring, entering and finalising results. That is one of our problem areas. We are currently looking at available good practices, and at how we should move ahead. Another important topic is the role of the examination board within the organisation, in particular with regard to the executive board – where is the divide between their and our responsibilities?’

Elissaveta Radulova
*Member of the Maastricht
University examination board*



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Research universities and universities of applied sciences: learn from each other!

Susan Voogd (VU)

In the **Further Improvement*** report, examination boards express their willingness to learn and share good practices. The sharing of knowledge presupposes that the various parties are all familiar with the subject at hand, and that the concepts are clearly defined. In her workshop, Susan Voogd pointed out details to the participants that must be clarified or taken into account within their own institutions. Voogd is a testing and assessment expert, and works at VU University Amsterdam as chair of the examination board for higher-education healthcare programmes.

To illustrate the difficulties that arise due to vague definitions, Voogd started with the word 'examiner'. The Higher Education and Research Act and the report titled 'Responsible Assessment and Decisions in Higher Education' (Verantwoord toetsen en beslissen in het hoger onderwijs) do not use the same definition. This means that faculty policy must clearly define exactly what 'examiners' are, as the definition used has consequences for both examiners and others, as well as for the design of the test system. The issue raised various questions. For example, is it permissible to appoint multiple examiners for a single test? Is there a clear definition of 'taking a test'? What criteria do we apply to the appointment of examiners, and can they be external parties?

Voogd emphasised the fact that examination boards are already performing very well: they are testing and improving together, both within and outside of the institution. To safeguard quality, Voogd advised collaborative testing, giving each other con-

stant feedback, and also documenting this feedback in order to enable joint development of testing and assessment expertise. All universities can learn from each other in this way. The workshop's key conclusion was that adequate testing and assessment expertise is required in both the management hierarchy and the examination board. Voogd added: 'Be inspired by others. Test their thoughts on the matter.'

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate advises institutions to exchange knowledge. This workshop demonstrated good practices from the conclusion of the report, and participants were called on to share their knowledge.



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‘During the workshop, it was important to me to hear how other institutions were doing. It’s good to be able to verify your own practices against those of others. It was also interesting to hear about the similarities and differences between research universities and universities of applied sciences. I thought they would be worlds apart, but they were not as dissimilar as I expected, which is useful to know.’

Elly Holthuisen
*University Medical Center Utrecht,
Utrecht University*

‘I picked up a lot of good ideas during the workshop. What I found most inspiring were the stories about short lines of communication at some universities of applied sciences. The presentation was very clear, and it was interesting to hear about the differences between research universities and universities of applied sciences. We have a large student population at the University of Twente, and international students are a major focus. The visibility of test quality is particularly important for this group.’

Hèla Klaczynski
*Secretary, University of Twente
examination board*



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[Interview with Looijenga, et al.](#)

[Presentation: Looijenga](#)

[Presentation: Minnema](#)

[Presentation: Van Stokkum](#)

Testing and assessment, and the limited evaluation of study programmes

Sietze Looijenga (QANU), Hester Minnema (Leiden University) and Ivo van Stokkum (VU University Amsterdam)

Inspection panels always meet with the examination board during their inspections. What approach do they take? What are their experiences with examination boards? And how can inspection panels help examination boards to perform better? These are the questions that Sietze Looijenga, Director of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU), discussed during this workshop. QANU performs inspections at research universities. Hester Minnema and Ivo van Stokkum presented one of their university's good practices.

Tijdens een visitatie richten panels zich Looijenga began by saying that during an inspection, a panel will concentrate more on the results of an examination board's activities, rather than on the question of whether the board adequately fulfils all of its statutory duties. Only if a panel is critical of the quality of testing or final assignments/submissions will it scrutinise the method behind the assessment. This will include the formal procedures and guidelines established by the examination board and, as a logical extension thereof, the board's own performance. This way, inspection panels that carry out a limited performance assessment can exert a major influence on the quality and safeguarding of testing and assessment.

University of Groningen and Leiden University: major improvements

Nearly all 'unsatisfactory' grades issued until now by the inspection panels related to the third standard in the NVAO's previous

accreditation framework (which incorporated both the testing system and the level achieved). Faculties that received an unsatisfactory evaluation have proven quite able to respond effectively, said Looijenga. He cited examples from faculties that had taken the critical comments by inspection panels to heart in order to improve their testing and assessment system, giving quality a substantial boost. The Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Groningen, for example, has drastically altered its testing and assessment system in response to the evaluation of the university's chemistry programmes, which have now made the grade.

The Bachelor of Criminology at Leiden University is another example. Hester Minnema, education manager at the Leiden University Faculty of Law, related her experiences. The inspection panel concluded that the Bachelor of Criminology final thesis was sub-par. Although the examination board was operating effectively, it was still in the process of finding ways to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. The panel advised creating a schedule for the phased implementation of its intensified role, and the faculty devoted explicit attention to this recommendation during its improvement activities. For example, further professional development was provided for examination board members (through training and selection), as well as intensification of quality assurance via the faculty examination board. And the results? The NVAO awarded the programme a final grade of 'good' instead of 'unsatisfactory' for standard 3. >>



RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

In its report, the Inspectorate notes that decisions by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and the underlying observations from inspection reports correspond to the results of the inquiry. Nearly all faculties that are currently undergoing an improvement process report problems with the examination board. This workshop looked at the view taken during inspections of testing in general and examination boards in particular, and showed that inspection panels can have a major impact on the performance of examination boards.

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[Presentation: Looijenga](#)

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>> VU University Amsterdam examination-board stands out

During its inspection, said Looijenga, the Faculty of Sciences at VU University Amsterdam stood out straight away in a positive sense. This was due in part to the quality assurance of its testing and assessment, in which the faculty examination board played an important part. Ivo van Stokkum, lecturer and member of multiple boards including this examination board, explained their practices.

First of all Van Stokkum described the advantages of a single faculty examination board as opposed to many separate boards. These advantages include increased flexibility, opportunities to make use of each other's expertise, and the practical benefit of having to produce only one annual report. He went on to explain how the quality of interim and final examina-

tions is safeguarded: every course has a second lecturer who shares responsibility for the tests; final assignments are assessed by two independent staff members; and plagiarism checks are mandatory for all tests. The assessment committee (a sub-committee of the examination board) will investigate any examinations for which exceptional results were obtained, or that were problematic the year before.

To illustrate, Von Stokkum discussed a case in which the assessment committee successfully intervened after a remarkable number of 9s and 10s had been awarded for a particular examination. It turned out that all of the multiple-choice questions had been recycled. The results of the examination were declared invalid, and all students were given the opportunity to resit at their convenience. For validation purposes, the examiner was ordered to submit

the next resit to the assessment committee, which then ran correctly. The assessment committee also checked the examination the following year, which contained a completely new set of questions.

Majority of test systems effective

Looijenga concluded the workshop by observing that most academic/research programmes use effective test systems, and that there are examples of programmes that exceed the basic level. Faculties that do not reach the standard at the time of their inspection are usually able to take appropriate measures quickly.

‘Following improvement activities, the Criminology programme at UL was awarded a final grade of “good” instead of “unsatisfactory”

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Ensuring quality and standards in joint higher education programmes with international partner institutions

Peter Wieringa and Marinke Sussenbach (Delft University of Technology)

Education institutions are offering more and more forms of online teaching, and are increasingly operating in an international context. One example of this international focus is joint education programmes, which are offered in conjunction with international institutions. Vice-rector of Delft University of Technology Peter Wieringa and Delft Extension School and Joint Education policy officer Marinke Sussenbach looked at how these developments affect examination boards.

Forms of collaboration between Dutch institutions and international partners are expected to multiply in the years ahead, possibly resulting in complications for examination boards. For example: when providing joint international or other tracks/programmes, Dutch institutions must comply with both Dutch legislation and the quality requirements of the partner institution abroad, which are not always compatible. In addition, examination boards have had to deal with stricter legislation in recent years, while the number of requirements has not diminished.

Taken together, these developments present the various institutional stakeholders with new challenges. How can the quality of such initiatives be safeguarded? Wieringa and Sussenbach demonstrated Delft University of Technology's experiences in the field of online and joint education programmes. The university has set up a special test framework that can assist institutions in the creation of fully-fledged joint education programmes. The test framework is available upon request from Marinke Sussenbach: M.S.D.Sussenbach@tudelft.nl.

RELEVANCE TO 'FURTHER IMPROVEMENT'

The report outlines how the plans to make higher education more flexible will increase the need for further improvement among examination boards. Developments such as exchange and joint education programmes also challenge examination boards to find new ways of safeguarding quality. Delft University of Technology outlined these challenges during the workshop.

'Dutch institutions must comply with both Dutch legislation and the quality requirements of the partner institution abroad'

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‘I am interested to see how admissions procedures at universities of applied sciences will develop, as they can be very complex. Take students from China, for example. What are their diplomas worth? Can they be admitted? Are they entitled to exemptions to certain subjects? How do we deal with issues of this kind? I have plenty of experience in this area, and am eager to share what I know. I also hope to hear other people’s perspectives on certain issues. So today’s event is quite important; all of the relevant actors and stakeholders are right here.’

Peter Nonhof
Admissions, Stenden University of Applied Sciences

‘I’m the sidekick during one of the workshops, but that’s not the main reason I’m here. Thankfully I’m here to present the workshop, because the event was booked out quite soon. I really wanted to be here. There is so much happening right now that affects examination boards, and this is the ideal opportunity to stay up-to-date and hear about the approaches taken by other people.’

Hester Minnema
Education Manager, Leiden University



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'The rewards of investments are evident'

Interview with Wienke Blomen (Hobéon), Sietze Looijenga (QANU) and René Kloosterman (AeQui)

Assessment agencies evaluate higher-education study programmes, and their inspection panels speak to a wide variety of examination boards. What have they found out over the past few years? What problems do they typically encounter, and what advice do they give? Directors Wienke Blomen (Hobéon), Sietze Looijenga (QANU) and René Kloosterman (AeQui) share their insights below.

How have examination boards developed over the last few years?

René Kloosterman: 'Examination boards are far more active than they used to be. With improvements to both professional development and their identity within institutions, they are now all busy making progress. What is evident is that the rate of progress relies heavily on the board members themselves. In general, examination boards are progressing at a reasonable rate; some are lagging behind somewhat, and others progress so quickly that they risk "losing touch" with education.'

Sietze Looijenga: 'In recent years, much has changed in research-oriented education with regard to examination boards' performance and the interpretation of their duties. To a large extent, these changes are the result of amendments to the Higher Education and Research Act, and of an increased focus on quality assurance within institutions in response to the implementation of the institutional quality assurance test. Examination boards who see their

primary role as that of an "administrative" body – not an uncommon view ten years ago – have effectively become a thing of the past. Examination boards are increasingly adopting a more subject-oriented perspective in line with the amendments to the Act. They are creating a clearer identity for themselves, feel more responsible for everything related to testing and assessment, and anticipate more. Board members are generally more prepared for the work they do, have often attended training courses or workshops, and are aware of the statutory requirements and the duties and responsibilities they entail.'

Wienke Blomen: 'The reports from our panels have shown that examination boards have improved significantly in recent years. There have been major investments in more and better forms of facilitative support for examination boards, as well as in their identity and professional development. The rewards are evident, as shown by the results of the Inspectorate's inquiry. Still, the reports by our panels also highlight areas for improvement, such as the identity of examination boards, their relationship with examiners (who are also their colleagues) and the support they receive (see box titled 'Areas for improvement').'

Could you give examples of typical recommendations given by the inspection panels to examination boards?

Kloosterman: 'The recommendations that we give are always related to the perceived rate of progress that I mentioned before. So we either recommend becoming a little more pro-active, or to keep the integration with study programmes in mind. One recommendation that we never give during inspections but that I would like to mention all the >>



Wienke Blomen
Director Hobéon Groep BV



René Kloosterman
Director AeQui



Sietze Looijenga
Director QANU

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>> same, is to try to make yourselves redundant within three years. Examination boards are, and have always been, a safeguarding instrument; the actual quality of tests is realised elsewhere. Devoting attention to the greater whole will ultimately result in better education.'

Looijenga: 'The most common recommendation that we have always issued is to be more pro-active. Panels believe that examination boards should monitor the quality of testing actively and improve it where necessary. Another common recommendation is for examination boards to promote consistency and transparency in testing and assessment. This advice often pertains to the assessment of final assignments or theses, e.g. if panels believe that the assessment forms used are either not good enough or are completed incorrectly.'

Blomen: 'One good example comes from a university of applied sciences that I visited recently, which used an incredibly detailed assessment form for final theses. In fact it was so comprehensive that the assessors felt overwhelmed, and were ultimately unable to demonstrate whether students had actually attained the competencies or not. Of course, the recommendations issued by our panels depend on the specific context, and may relate to the board's statutory tasks, prioritisation, and operationalisation of quality requirements (see 'Recommendations for Examination Boards').'

What do you think of today's event?

Kloosterman: 'It's fantastic that they organised it. The fact that they issued such an interesting report and then followed through with a day like this is great.'

Looijenga: 'I agree completely. Just perfect.'

Blomen: 'The Inspectorate did sometimes demonstrate typical "inspector" behaviour in the past: conducting inquiries in secret, failing to incorporate the opinions of the institutions under inspection in their reports, and – sometimes rightly so – setting a negative tone. That is not the case here. They have been very open about the inquiry from the start, and have

contributed ideas to developments in the field. They involved a number of people in a feedback group, and consulted with 200 examination boards in round-table discussions during the inquiry. The report had already won support among higher education institutions before the ink had dried. The same success is evident today: rather than resisting the Inspectorate, people – the boards especially – feel partly supported by the results. This has also set the tone for today. The inquiry has been quite pleasant.'

René Kloosterman: 'This is the Inspectorate, version 2.0!'

SCALING UP

Sietze Looijenga notes a striking development in how examination boards are organised: upscaling. What are the benefits?

'In the past, nearly every study programme had its own examination board. But now, more and more examinations board are responsible for multiple programmes, such as all programmes within a faculty, school or graduate school. This increase in scale offers clear advantages in terms of professional development, specialisation, efficiency and the workloads of teaching staff. The most obvious drawback is a drop in subject-related expertise. Examination boards can compensate for this quite effectively, however, by setting up sub-committees that contain representatives from specific study programmes. One of the presentations during my workshop was about this type of broader, faculty-wide examination board.

This development is part of an important cultural shift currently taking place among universities, one effect of which is a decrease in the traditional autonomy of academic staff. Another is the fact that they can also be held accountable for the teaching they provide and the tests they administer, including the results.'

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TAKING ACTION

Although many examination boards are making improvements, there are faculties where progress is lagging. Sietze Looijenga described the factors that play a role.

‘It is often the smaller programmes that get left behind. For example, since 2010 humanities programmes have devoted a lot of time to curriculum modifications as part of the Sustainable Humanities programme, and in preparation for the 2012 and 2013 inspections. Examination boards were put on the back burner during this time, which probably partly explains why the examination boards of a relatively large number of humanities programmes received critical feedback from inspection panels.

These boards are usually those responsible for a single programme or for a combination of a Bachelor’s programme and subsequent Master’s, that is, smaller boards that have not been absorbed into larger ones. These boards feel that it is harder to do justice to the subject-specific aspects of testing as part of a larger examination board. They also tend to have problems with the fact that the new role of examination boards infringes on the traditional autonomy of academic staff, who teach and administer tests without others getting involved or knowing exactly what it is they do. In these situations, the necessary cultural shift is delayed, or takes longer.

I believe that the examination boards with a more entrenched traditional approach will be forced to “modernise” their practices and procedures in the near future. Otherwise, executive boards and deans consider the risks to study programmes (e.g. during inspections) to be too great.’

IMPROVEMENT AREAS

Wienke Blomen describes four problem areas regularly observed by the panels, and the opportunities for development they represent.

Struggling with identity

‘The subject of identity applies not only to examination boards, but also to management and the executive board, and mostly concerns the operationalisation and optimisation of the examination board’s independence. Everyone involved – but executive boards, management, examiners and lecturers in particular – still does not always see the full scope and implications of this process as self-evident. It is a developmental process, true, and there is nothing wrong with that. It is also about the examination board’s authority. Examination boards must acquire this authority through professional, expert action and appropriate communication, but it also depends on administrative and managerial commitment. The executive board and management must support the examination board, and their commitment must be beyond all doubt. This, too, is a developmental process.’

Delicate relationship with fellow examiners

‘Many examiners are also colleagues of examination board members. The smaller the faculty, the more the delicate nature of these relationships becomes obvious. Examination boards appoint examiners (and can revoke these appointments), and issue guidelines and instructions. Study programmes need time to adjust, especially those that have not used the appointment of examiners as a quality assurance instrument in the past. But again: this process takes time.’

Scope of interim and final examinations (and quality assurance)

‘Some examination boards are still unclear on the scope of the concepts of “interim examination” and “final examination”. Examination boards must safeguard the quality of all aspects of testing and assessment: an area that relates to all work produced or behaviours demonstrated by students that are assessed as part of the study programme. This assessment will then determine whether course credits are awarded or not. The scope therefore extends beyond traditional examinations and final assignments/theses. Examination boards are becoming increasingly aware of this fact. Attention to learning and testing “on the job” is still an area for improvement within many faculties and examination boards.

There is also a growing recognition of the fact that quality assurance involves more than just supervision. It is about taking pro-active steps: setting quality requirements for the design and implementation of testing and assessment and for examiners, through the guidelines and instructions the board issues. It must also act responsively, by monitoring implementation through spot-checks, the intensity of which may decrease as confidence in the examiners grows.’

Differences in support due to underestimated workload

‘Support in terms of time, budget, administrative and subject-related support, training, etc. must be determined by the scope and nature of an examination board’s duties and the extent to which they are outsourced. In practice, we have noticed that institutions are still trying to strike a balance – the hallmark of a change process that has not yet fully crystallised.’

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ADVICE FOR EXAMINATION BOARDS

Five practical recommendations issued regularly by inspection panels are summarised below by Wienke Blomen.

Focus on your statutory duties

‘Generally, examination boards that are still busy making the transition from “bookkeeper” to “watchful eye” spend most of their energy on ensuring the effective fulfilment of their statutory duties. In such cases, panels recommend leaving aside any additional tasks, such as admissions or the binding negative study advice.’

Set priorities

‘Rome wasn’t built in a day. Examination boards must set priorities based on importance, urgency and capacity, to be set out in a development schedule covering a period of around two years. To examination boards still at the outset of their development, panels often recommend focusing initially on targeted research into the quality of testing and assessment during the first and final years of the study programme.’

Make quality criteria operational

‘It is useful for examination boards to work in conjunction with the faculty to translate criteria such as reliability, validity, transparency, objectivity/ intersubjectivity, recognisability and feasibility into concrete requirements and mechanisms.’

Organise and direct calibration sessions

‘However objective an assessment framework may be, its interpretation and application can vary from examiner to examiner. It is important, therefore, for the relevant examiners to arrive at an optimum consensus regarding the key considerations within each section of an assessment framework that determine a grade – unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or good.’

Clarify the types of support that are necessary

‘Discuss the types of support that are essential to successful performance explicitly with the executive board and management, and insist on fixed agreements.’

‘The report
had already
won support
among higher
education
institutions
before the ink
had dried’

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A stroll through the Infomarket

Exhibitors take the floor

During the conference, information stands had been set up by various people and institutions with something special to report on the performance of examination boards. Once of the stands was devoted to good practices: practices that institutions were keen to share due to their own positive experiences. The Higher Education Press Agency (Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau, HOP) also attended, and wrote an article on the conference. Some exhibitors share their experiences below.

‘Two years ago we put together a booklet titled “Testing: Not less, just different”, in order to aid examination boards when asked for altered forms of testing for students with a functional disability. We know that this idea still makes people nervous, because how can you know whether the person has attained the required competencies? This booklet enables modifications to be made without compromising on quality. I think it’s a pity that the Inspectorate’s report doesn’t mention it explicitly. Today I hope to speak to lots of people, and underline its importance.’

Lex Jansen

Senior consultant, handicap + studie Expertise Centre



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‘We are working hard on the visibility of our association, because our work is targeted precisely at the people here today. Our objective is to represent the interests of examination boards, test writers and policymakers. To safeguard exit levels, we conduct joint research into what it takes to create good-quality exams. When can we consider today a success, you ask? It’s already a success: we’re here, have already had a number of interesting discussions and until now we have met with nothing but enthusiasm. We take heart in the fact that our association clearly has a raison d’être.’

Barbara Suijkerbuijk
Executive Board Member, Dutch Association for Examinations (NVE)

‘I found it particularly instructive and important to come and take a behind-the-scenes look today. Personally, I am in favour of more flexible education. I think that more variation in testing is a good thing, and today I spoke to many people who share this opinion. I believe that examination boards can play an important part in this.’

Irma van Slooten
Coach, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Netherlands



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‘I am very interested in the experiences of examination boards in higher professional and senior secondary vocational education. We currently operate in private education, and I am keen to find out how they maintain independence in the creation and assessment of interim and final examinations. There is new legislation (good legislation, if you ask me), and I am curious as to how these schools organise it and what problems they encounter. Today we’re here to help. We’ve been doing this for 70 years, and are happy to share what we know. We even have our own stand, so offering assistance will be no problem at all.’

Astrid Hanou
Quality Assurance Officer, Dutch Association for Examinations

‘The Good Practices stand attracted a lot of visitors. People rummaged through the folders, and even copied down tips and examples on the spot. We are glad that our knowledge is being shared this way. Incidentally, the good practices are available to everybody via this e-magazine.’

Anne-Marie van Rijsbergen
*Higher Education Inspector,
Inspectorate of Education*



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Working on education's weakest link

Jan Anthonie Bruijn

Jan Anthonie Bruijn is well-known from the [External Validation Report](#) (Vreemde ogen dwingen), but is also a member of the Dutch Senate, professor of immunopathology at Leiden University, ex-member of the Education Council and member of the Utrecht University Supervisory Board. His work therefore covers various levels of education and examination. In his plenary presentation, he outlined the frameworks for a practical agenda for examination boards.

Today I would like to speak to you with only one of my many hats on: that of lecturer and examiner in research-oriented education. When I arrived this morning, I was struck by the unique location, in which trains take centre stage. Examination boards are also on board a moving train. Attendance today is twice as high as anticipated, which is great to see. Perhaps the name of the Inspectorate of Education should be changed to 'Inspiration of Education'! It's wonderful that the Inspectorate has organised this event, and that so many parties from higher education are here today.

The Dutch education system is one of the best in the world, due to the quality of our teachers and lecturers, and to society's involvement in education. My personal experience as a lecturer has taught me that testing and assessment is the weakest link in our system. Perhaps that is why it is so exciting for all of us to be here today. If we can do something about it, we will be improving all of education: the most important portfolio there is.

So we are all on board a moving train. In

2008 the Dijsselbloem report was issued, which looked at the question of whether the education system could be improved. The essence of the report was: let's separate the 'what' from the 'how', and test the 'whether' more effectively (i.e. whether the learning objectives are being achieved). That is what the examination boards are all about.

Setting an agenda: the ins and outs

Today is a special day, because we are working on the weakest link in our already strong education system. I did not realise until at least ten years after I had created my first university examinations that the examination board even existed, let alone that they had appointed me as an examiner.

The role and visibility of examination boards has changed a lot in recent years. But what can be improved? According to the Inspectorate's report, the board's duties and identity could be defined much more clearly, and by that I mean the relationships between the various committees, clear communication and concise prioritisation. Topics such as teaching methods are the domain of the education committee, an area that the examination board should simply stay away from. Likewise, we still see too many programme committees elbowing in on testing and examination. Committees often communicate with other bodies which – according to the organisational chart – they have nothing to do with. Of course this can sometimes be useful, but all too often it is counterproductive. So keep it simple, and aim for 'deregulation' instead of creating more regulations. Incidentally, nowhere does the Further Improvement report suggest even one additional regulation. >>



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>> Breaking free of mediocrity

Nowadays all examination boards must have at least one external member, in order to guarantee the independence of quality assurance. Another way to foster independence is to engage external examiners. One organic way to do this is through joint examinations. This is possible when using 'snapshot' exams, however in 1977 Maastricht University introduced a much more innovative instrument: the learning pathway-independent, institution-wide progress test. This test is administered to all students, say, every three months, and assesses them at the programme's exit level.

The Maastricht progress test has several advantages: it facilitates stronger institutional identity in accordance with Veerman, and is transparent. The test also offers a major economic advantage, as it involves much less work than unit-based testing, and no resits are required. Also, students' typical study tactics (quickly reviewing the old questions the day before) do not work, and a more constant investment of energy is rewarded. If we were to implement this as a standard method, we would break free of our 'culture of mediocrity' straight away, because it brings added value and the benefits of study into focus.

Examiners' registry

As a doctor I need to be registered, so that patients can see whether I satisfy a certain minimum standard when it comes to keeping my

professional skills up to date. I like this system, especially when viewed from a patient's perspective. My proposal is that a similar system be introduced into education: set minimum requirements for the testing and assessment expertise of examiners, set a standard for professional development, and most of all allow the professional community to formulate that standard themselves through an ongoing process and discussion.

In 2013, via an expert group, we launched the BKE and SKE examiner accreditation standards in the hope that they would trigger internal discussions among education institutions. Many institutions did take up the idea and some agencies included a certification system, so that now there are plenty of avenues for professional development. Quality still remains in the hands of the institutions themselves, but from an external quality assurance perspective, it's a good thing they are running with it.

The question is: should training also be compulsory for examiners? Will we take the same path as the medical profession? One possible argument against this idea is the fact that no retraining is required for people with a driver's license, for example. But that's not to say that road safety wouldn't improve if we all did half a day's training every five years, to brush up on new legislation and road signals.

>>

'As a teacher it took me at least ten years before I realised that the examination board even existed'



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>> Towards a practical agenda

As far as I could tell, I was never officially appointed by an examination board. I never knew about it. Now I do, but I have never spoken to any members of the examination board. In fact, the Inspectorate's inquiry revealed that one third of all examiners are unaware of their own appointment. In turn, one third of examination boards state that they would not know what to do in the event that examiners produce poor-quality exams. Many improvements can be made in this regard.

We must work towards an agenda that has more practical applicability. Are you all clear on what your duties are, and – more importantly – what they are not? Look at your responsibilities, and see whether you can do anything about your independence. And what about your expertise? We talk about BKE, but actually it's about setting the bar for yourself. Find out whether your exam papers cover all competencies, and agree on a maximum allowable percentage of recycled questions. Have outsiders come and observe – yes, research universities, even you – and watch your tests improve as part of quality agreements. Prize efficiency in all that you do, as our workload is already too great. We must reduce the amount of regulation, limit ourselves to our core duties and create smart, innovative instruments that can improve both quality and efficiency, such as the Maastricht progress test.

Lastly: know thyself, and use the tools available to you. We have an incredibly effective education system. Trust people, but remember to verify their work as well.



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Students on the examination board?

Plenty of insights for further improvement

The workshops, interviews and presentations all offered plenty of food for thought. So what should we do now? What can be done with all the information gathered today? The plenary panel discussion offered some initial suggestions. Mediated by Cor Ottens, panel members Liesbeth Zijlstra (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, LOEx), Nellie Harms (VU University Amsterdam), Martine Pol (Inspectorate of Education) and Lex Sietses (former Dutch National Union of Students Executive Board member) shared their opinions, and put forward some propositions to the audience.

First of all, Ottens asked Further Improvement project manager Martine Pol what surprised her most during her work. Pol: 'The level of diversity among

the examination boards in the various institutions is what struck me in particular. Of course diversity is not an issue, provided that every examination board is pursuing its own developmental course. I am very glad therefore that there are 600 people here today; we can learn a lot from each other. But diversity should not be the result of some examination boards and managers choosing to settle for lower standards.'

A valuable diploma

Some of the propositions also involved the audience: Ottens asked them to stand if they were in agreement with the statement under discussion. The microphone was handed to Liesbeth Zijlstra, chair of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences examination board and of the National Examinations Board Consultative Body (Landelijk Overleg Examencommissies),

who asked her fellow panel members and the audience to respond to the following: 'The value of a diploma cannot be guaranteed without a properly functioning examination board.'

Students are the primary focus of education, Zijlstra argues, and students must have the opportunity to obtain a degree that is worth something. A large majority of the audience stood up. Still, some criticism was expressed. One audience member said that the statement's formulation was too narrow: 'There are other factors besides the examination board that determine the quality of education.'

Students on the examination board

Lex Sietses was involved in the inquiry as a student, and is in favour of the proposition that examination boards should >>



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>> also contain student members: 'No students from the same faculty, but from other faculties. Students' main criticism of examination boards is that they are not transparent. Students wonder about the reasoning behind certain decisions, and believe the board to be invisible.' According to Sietses, students can help bring about change by joining examination boards themselves, bridging the gap between the boards and the student body and increasing the support base.

Many attendees were hesitant about giving students a place on the examination board. Nellie Harms, education director at the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences at VU University Amsterdam, wondered what risks such a decision would entail. She herself supports the proposition that examination boards have the tendency to try to take over the job of the programme director. Zijlstra and Sietses said they would rather turn the proposition around: in their experience, it is usually the managers who try to usurp the role of the examination board. The audience was equally divided on the issue.

Rewards

No consensus was reached during the discussion, but that was not the point. Everybody could apply the insights gained today in their own way, to help further improve their own examination board. That was the true reward of the day's event.



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Follow-up

Minister Jet Bussemaker asked all attendees to give thought to how they plan to follow up on today's proceedings. What will you take away with you? Read three responses below.

'I already have a few "quick wins" in mind for tomorrow. First of all we'll discuss the guidelines we plan to issue to our examiners. Second, we'll create a registry of our own appointed examiners, which we will then publish in order to ensure that students and other examiners know them. In the long term, we wish to take part in the flexibility pilot. We need to think about a potential new role for our examination board.'

Ad van Zundert
Chair of the Part-Time Academy examination board, Avans University of Applied Sciences

'On the one hand, I can see that we are not doing too badly at all. On the other, international examination quality requires attention and needs to be more tightly controlled.'

Esther Brinkhoff
Examination Board member, Avans University of Applied Sciences

'First thing tomorrow I'll be sending the examiners their letters of appointment – an involved but important job. Maybe we'll digitise it for next year. One question struck me today: should students be allowed to sit on the examination board? Our organisation will certainly be discussing that one. I'll be interested to see what extra tasks will become part of our remit. All of the topics discussed today will also be part of tomorrow's meeting among the examination board chairs. We plan to power ahead.'

Charlotte Faber
Official secretary, University of Amsterdam Graduate School for Humanities



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‘I believe that today was a success. I’ve met many enthusiastic and inspiring people. Our aim was to give the report back to the professionals so that they can get to work, and that is what we achieved. We also wanted to draw attention to the changes that need to occur, and it is wonderful that they were highlighted today. I would like to thank everybody for their attendance today. The discussion certainly doesn’t end here, there is still plenty to do. The glass is half full, and I hope to see you again in the future, with even fuller glasses.’

Monique Vogelzang
Inspector-General, Inspectorate of Education



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Many articles in this magazine contain links to background materials, either as part of the text or under ‘More information’.

These can include PowerPoint presentations, the workshop handouts or good practices: examples of procedures that institutions believe worked well within their own context and that they would like to share with their fellow organisations. Links are also included to documents beyond the scope of the workshops, such as related articles and reports.

The list below presents the more general sources; click on the relevant title to go to that publication. The literature list is followed by good practices, divided into six sections.

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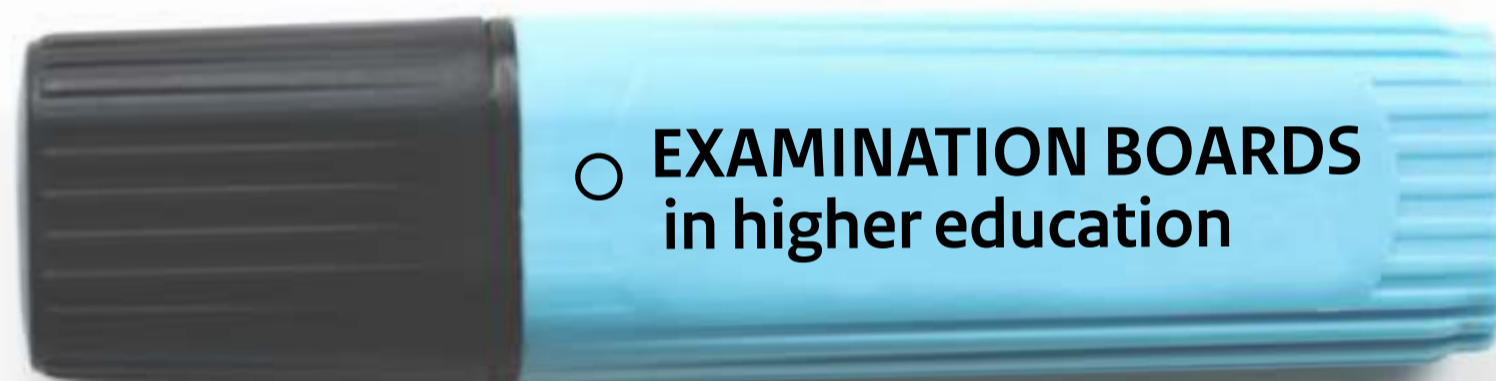
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