

## **Abstract**

The Committee that conducted the institutional review of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) advises the NVAO to decide on a positive evaluation. The Committee has established that the VUB has both a strong quality culture and adequate governance for assuring the quality of education, and is striving for continuous improvement of both.

The Committee arrived at this positive conclusion based on the investigation it conducted into the educational policy of the VUB, including the actions it takes to guarantee the quality of its programmes. On the basis of characteristics that emerged clearly, and with the necessary substantiation, from the information file, the Committee formed a first impression of the institution prior to the first site visit. The first site visit enabled the Committee to further refine this initial impression and to identify a number of themes that it wanted to explore in depth. After consultation with the institution's management, the Committee drew up a research proposal for the second, more in-depth site visit. In it, the Committee proposed a number of topics (governance and allocation; management information system; workload and professionalization) that it wanted to examine via desk research in the run-up to the site visit. In addition, it proposed a number of topics (internationalization; testing policy and monitoring of final attainment levels; operation of the informal (quality) culture) on which it wanted to obtain a clearer picture by talking to a number of stakeholders and representatives of a number of study programmes. In consultation with the institution's management, the committee selected three programmes with a different history in terms of both embedding in the VUB as well as the implementation of internal quality assurance systems: Industrial Sciences, Law and Specialist Medicine (master-after-master).

The interviews, which took place in an open and reflective atmosphere, helped the committee to complete, refine and/or adjust its impression of the institution. The topics of the research proposal formed the common thread throughout the interviews. During the discussions with the faculties and programmes, two additional themes emerged: providing opportunities for authentic practice-based learning in programmes; and the issue of diverse enrolment and drop-out rates.

The Committee strongly appreciates the VUB's mission to be an Urban Engaged University, which wants to make optimal use of its location in Brussels to set up learning and research strategies in which the global and local dynamics of the Brussels context merge. With the strategic plan, the sub-policy plans at faculty and departmental level and the (strategic) projects, the VUB has developed a well-considered and balanced set of policy instruments, whereby the allocation model offers the institution's management the necessary policy space to use its financial resources in a targeted manner. The Committee greatly appreciates the developed governance model, in which systems, structures and people work together to realize the intended policy objectives, and in which the quality assurance officers form an essential link between the various policy levels. The processes and tools for policy implementation have been developed in such a way that they support the strong quality culture already present, in which formal and informal quality processes are mutually supportive. The committee was very impressed by the quality culture at the VUB, which was tangible in all interviews and at all policy levels. The committee is most appreciative of the way in which student participation is embedded at every level of administration.

The Committee found that the present governance enables the VUB to guarantee the quality of each accredited study programme in an internationally accepted manner. The strong governance, the ownership of quality development by the Programme Councils, the support by the central services and

the presence of the Education Quality Council together guarantee the quality of the programmes at the VUB. The above also provides the committee with the necessary confidence that the new quality cycle will be implemented in a qualitative manner.

The committee has also identified areas for improvement. Against this background, it formulates a number of recommendations, which do not detract from the Committee's current assessment:

- Give benchmarking and the external view on the extend of which students achieve the intended learning outcomes an even more explicit place in the quality cycle.
- Steer even more strongly towards the realization of the goal of making all students world citizens.
- Keep looking for ways to include authentic practice-based learning in training.
- Provide a clearer, bolder and more comprehensive policy to address the complex issue of the study progress of students from a migrant background.