

# University of Luxembourg

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## Response to the NVAO External Evaluation of Teaching 2020

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The external evaluation summarised in the reports presented by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) marks the first peer review of the University's educational mission since its foundation in 2003. To the University community, it presented a valuable opportunity to account for and reflect upon the quality of its educational offer, in the light of the academic standards that determine its success internationally as an ambitious research university, and vis-à-vis the expectations of our students and stakeholders. The University recognises the effectiveness of the approach that was defined by the Ministry for Higher Education and Research, which allowed it to involve all educational actors across the institution in a concerted and comprehensive reflection on past achievements and the next steps in development. NVAO has been a professional and constructive partner in the process, and the University is grateful for the good collaboration with the agency and the members of the panel, which was essential for a smooth organisation despite the circumstances of the pandemic.

The University believes that the assessment presented by the evaluation panel in its reports demonstrates a remarkable comprehension of the University's current situation, as well as of its strategic intentions for the future. The reports confirm the robustness of the main conclusions of the University's self-assessment, including the need to accentuate the University's educational profile, to further institutionalise quality assurance processes, to invest in its capacity for coordination of institutional strategy and to focus more systematically on its educational impact. In turn, the University feels that the panel's findings and recommendations provide valuable guidance for the University's agenda setting, in particular in view of current preparations for the next Four-Year-Plan starting in 2022. In our opinion, most of the panel's recommendations reinforce the University's development agenda and lend support to a number of initiatives and strategic projects that are either already underway, or are proposed to be included in the next development phase, which includes the implementation of the University's Strategy Framework.

#### **Alignment with Strategic Objectives**

With the definition of a Strategy Framework 2020-2039 for the next two decades, and the space that was allowed within that work for the findings of the NVAO Evaluation project, the University has created the foundation for a coherent learning and teaching strategy involving all levels of educational provision, and in conjunction with its commitments in its other missions of research and service to society. The Strategy Framework will enable the University to articulate, align and implement strategy systematically, at both central and decentral levels, through its main planning instruments, including the next Four-Year-Plan. Preparations include an action plan for defining the internal monitoring of progress towards objectives, some of which already exist in the current Four-Year-Plan (2014-17), while others will be part of the next Four-Year-Plan. This recommendation was highlighted by the NVAO panel in its Critical Summary Report. In addition, the panel's recommendations support the planned development of an improved multilingual offer in teaching and the development of a mature internationalisation strategy. A



focus on the relationship between teaching and research will allow the University's three Interdisciplinary Centres to have a more explicit dialogue with the Faculty-based study programmes. Other initiatives include the greater prominence of the Luxembourg Learning Centre as a resource that can support the development of a vibrant learning culture.

The panel's reflections on educational provision underline the importance of continuing ongoing efforts for a learner-centred education and for a comprehensive enhancement of the student experience. This concerns additional steps towards an effective use of learning technology in implementing project-based learning methodologies as well as developing blended learning (notably building on the ongoing investment in hybrid teaching technology, which should be followed by the establishment of digital pedagogy support across the University). The panel's recommendations reinforce the timeliness of recent investments in professionalising student services, administrative workflows and the IT infrastructure for student and course management. The provision of appropriate study and leisure spaces on campus, the development of a mature offer of residential accommodation and the fostering of a student-friendly culture are also targeted for managed improvement in the short- and medium-term.

### **Quality Assurance in Education**

Another important set of findings concern quality assurance in education. The self-assessment process for the evaluation has been a productive test case for the implementation of a comprehensive quality assurance framework for education at the University. Steps for a further institutionalisation of quality assurance have already been initiated and the University will continue to document, implement and develop the respective processes. This includes better oversight of examinations, the provision of more systematic data on student and graduate outcomes, the continuation of efforts to integrate student and alumni feedback in enhancement processes, the creation of a framework for the development and certification of teaching competences, and the systematic integration of peer-elements and benchmarks in the monitoring and review of educational activities. The University is committed to continuing the work towards attaining the appropriate profile for a successful institutional accreditation by c. 2025.

### **Governance and the Student Voice**

Concerning the governance processes through which strategy, educational policy, and quality development are defined and implemented, the University agrees with the panel on the importance of the involvement of students from the start of their studies to the moment when they enter the alumni network. Through the Student Delegation as well as student representatives in the Faculties and study programmes, students have access to decision-making processes at all levels, including the University Council and the Board of Governors. The University is committed to further support students to make their voices heard and to assist current student representatives in fulfilling their mandate effectively. Maintaining mutually beneficial relations with alumni and giving them a chance to give back, among other things by getting involved in study programme steering committees (this is one of the panel's recommendations), is another priority for which preparations have already begun.

The strong and successful engagement of personnel across the university in teaching and learning activities was reflected very clearly in the panel reports. The governance aspects of this internal culture will be strengthened, in order to introduce more transparency and to create clearer divisions of responsibility between entities and the central services, as well as within entities. As an advisory body to the Rector, the University Council guarantees representatives of all members of the university community a voice in the internal decision-making process. In academic affairs, steps already taken to more firmly integrate the University Council in governance and policy matters will be enhanced. Much of this work entails the harmonisation of procedures, the simplification of processes and the improvement of communication. Stronger governance is enabled by better and clearer support structures, and this last point is important for the successful implementation of the panel's broader recommendations.

In conclusion, the NVAO Evaluation has provided the University with recommendations that support its short-term aims and will help to develop its objectives in the medium- and long-term.

