

Netherlands Quality Agency



**NHL Stenden
University of Applied Sciences**

**Reassessment Bachelor
International Business**

Limited Study Programme Assessment

243A2022.01

Summary

In March 2022 the bachelor study programme International Business (IB) of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences was visited by an NQA audit panel. This visit was carried out to reassess standard 3 of the *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands* of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) 2018. The reassessment took place, since the previous audit panel assessed this standard as 'partially meets the standard' in 2020. This study programme is a full-time programme, taught in English and offered in the cities of Leeuwarden and Emmen.

The previous audit panel laid down the following requirements for the study programme to meet the generic quality on standard 3:

1. "Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the final assessments of the IBMS and IBL study programmes;
2. Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the assessment of the IB programme, explicitly including knowledge test and sufficient concrete plans to safeguard the final assessment of the IB study programme."

The present panel is of the opinion that the IB study programme of NHL Stenden Hogeschool now meets the generic quality on standard 3. Since 2020, the study programme has evidently made considerable progress with respect to student assessment. To achieve this, the study programme has taken tremendous steps, based on a detailed Recovery Plan. All stakeholders and relevant bodies, such as the Examination Committee and Test Committee, have been actively involved in this process. This has led to a large number of changes, not only in student assessment, but also in the study programme as a whole. The requirements laid down by the panel in 2020 have been met. Sufficient actions have been taken to safeguard and improve the final assessments of IBMS and IBL (first requirement). There is an adequate quality management system in place, with properly working evaluation cycles and active involvement of examiners, students, the Programme Committee, Examination Committee, Test Committee and Graduation Committee. Examiners work with the test cycle. The recovery trajectory has also been supported by extensive professionalisation with respect to student assessment. Calibration of assessments is frequent and has become common practice among examiners. The assessment forms of the graduation products have become better structured and more insightful. However, as to filling in these forms, there is room for further improvement, also adding more detailed feedback.

To safeguard and improve the assessment of the IB programme (second requirement), the study programme has taken similar actions as mentioned above. Specific actions haven executed to improve the knowledge tests, such hiring more experienced experts for various knowledge areas and improving the didactics in the knowledge modules.

The study programme has developed a new graduation project for IB, which was implemented in February 2022. This development was also carried out in close cooperation with relevant bodies and stakeholders. The panel is positive about the set-up of the new IB graduation project. It is an applied research project for an IB-organisation, in which students analyse a complex business problem in an international business setting for which they have to propose a solution in the form

of an advice or design. The new graduation project is accompanied by adequate supervision and assessment, the latter based on the four-eyes-principle.

In conclusion, the panel is positive about what has been achieved by the study programme in a relatively short period of time. This positive judgement also holds for the step taken by the management of the study programme to take the Recovery Plan in a broader perspective to make changes in the study programme as a whole, with more structure, formalisation and alignment as major goals.

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Introduction

This report concerns the reassessment of standard 3 of the *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands* of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) 2018, which was carried out for the bachelor study programme International Business (IB) of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences offered in Emmen and Leeuwarden. The reassessment was conducted by an audit panel compiled by Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA) and commissioned by NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences. Prior to the reassessment process, the audit panel had been approved by NVAO.

In this report, NQA gives account of its findings, considerations and conclusions. The reassessment was undertaken according to the *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands* of NVAO (September 2018) and the *NQA Guideline 2019 for Limited Programme Assessment*.

The site visit took place on 22 March 2022. The audit panel consisted of:

- Ing. J.C. (Joep) de Jong (chair)
- Drs. D.J.N.M. (Nies) Rijnders (domain expert)
- Ms W.J. (Wil) Hazelhoff-Pouwer MSc (domain expert)
- Ms K.R.Y. (Kim) Boerhout (student member)

Drs. M. (Mark) Fokkema, NQA-auditor, acted as secretary of the panel.

Method of working of the panel and process

For the reassessment, the study programme presented a state of affairs document with appendices, which the panel studied, see further Appendix 2. Central in the reassessment was the site visit by the panel. In a preliminary meeting the panel members were instructed about NQA's method of working and about the *NVAO-Assessment Framework*. In this meeting the panel members also discussed their tentative findings. During both the preliminary meeting and during the actual audit, the panel members shared their findings with each other continuously. During the site visit the panel spoke with various stakeholders of the study programme, such as students, alumni, lecturers (examiners) and management, see further Appendix 1. It also studied more documents, see appendix 2. At the end of the site visit the panel incorporated all the information it had obtained in an overall picture and in a tentative, substantiated assessment. In the final oral feedback session the panel chairperson communicated the conclusive assessment and the major findings of the panel.

After the site visit a draft report was formulated, which was presented to the panel. On the basis of the panel's input a second draft was made, which was presented to the study programme for a check on factual inaccuracies. The panel members have taken note of the reaction of the study programme and on the basis of that adapted the report. Subsequently, the report was established as definitive. With all information provided (orally and in writing) the panel has been able to make a deliberate judgement.

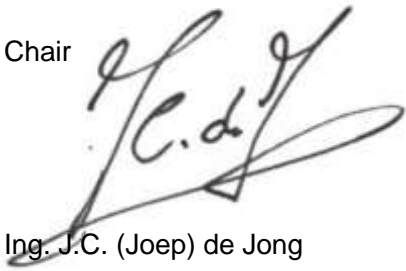
Note that since the cooperation with the IBMS study programme of NHL Stenden Qatar has been ended, this study programme was not part of the reassessment. However, as part of the panel's

study of a selection of assessments, it has studied the end works of one IBMS graduate from NHLStenden Qatar, see also Appendix 2.

The audit panel declares that the assessment of the study programme was carried out independently.

Utrecht, June 2, 2022

Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.C. de Jong', written in a cursive style.

Ing. J.C. (Joep) de Jong

Panel secretary

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Fokkema', written in a cursive style.

Drs. M. (Mark) Fokkema

Characteristic Features of the Study Programme

The current International Business (IB) study programme at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (NHL Stenden) has been offered since September 2018 in Emmen and Leeuwarden. The IB programme has currently 61 students in Emmen and 478 students in Leeuwarden. The IB programme originates from the previously offered study programmes of International Business and Management Studies (IBMS) in Leeuwarden and International Business and Languages (IBL) in Emmen and Leeuwarden. The change into IB was a planning neutral conversion. IBMS and IBL will be completely phased out by September 2023. IBMS has currently 73 students in the third and fourth year and IBL 54 students (IBL Emmen: 31 and IBL Leeuwarden: 23 students). The IB programme is part of the Academy Commerce & International Business, one of the 14 academies within NHL Stenden. Other study programmes that are offered within this academy are the bachelor programmes Marketing Management and Entrepreneurship & Retail Management. The IB study programme is presently engaged in two major developments. The first one is the implementation of Design Based Education as an educational approach, which is introduced broadly within NHL Stenden. Secondly, the study programme is developing a new curriculum, IB 2.0, which will be introduced in September 2023.

Reassessment Standard 3 Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Conclusion

The study programme **meets** the generic quality on standard 3.

The study programme has evidently made considerable progress with respect to student assessment. It now meets the generic quality on this standard. To achieve this, the study programme has taken tremendous steps, based on a detailed Recovery Plan. All stakeholders and relevant bodies, such as the Examination Committee and Test Committee, have been actively involved in this process. This has led to a considerable number of changes, not only in student assessment, but also in the study programme as a whole. The requirements laid down by the panel in 2020 have been met. Sufficient actions have been executed to safeguard and improve the final assessments of IBMS and IBL (first requirement). There is an adequate quality management system in place, with active roles of the Programme Committee, Examination Committee, Test Committee and Graduation Committee. Calibration of assessments is frequent and has become common practice among examiners. The assessment forms of the graduation products have become better structured and more insightful. However, as to completing these forms, there is still room for further improvement. The study programme has executed similar actions to safeguard and improve the assessment of the IB programme (second requirement). Moreover, the plans for the graduation phase of the new IB programme provide sufficient elements to safeguard the final assessment of IB.

In conclusion, the panel is positive about what has been achieved by the study programme in a relatively short period of time. This positive judgement also holds for the step taken by the management of the study programme to take the Recovery Plan in a broader perspective to make changes in the study programme as a whole, with more structure, formalisation and alignment as major goals. It appears that especially alignment is an ongoing concern within the study programme.

Substantiation

Introduction

In February 2020 the IB programme was audited by a panel of experts from NQA. This panel found that the generic quality on NVAO standard 3 was partially met, stating: “The panel has confidence that the current staff has the potential, with the right time and resources, to improve the quality assurance of the assessment of IBMS and IBL and pick up the quality assurance of the assessment for the IB programme, within two years.” The panel had established that the study programme acknowledged the need of improvement in these respects and that it had already plans indicating a suitable direction to improve quality. The following requirements were laid down to meet the generic quality on standard 3:

1. “Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the final assessments of the IBMS and IBL study programmes;
2. Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the assessment of the

IB programme, explicitly including knowledge test and sufficient concrete plans to safeguard the final assessment of the IB study programme.”

Regarding the first requirement, the panel recommended that the examiners of the graduation projects use a common working method when completing the assessment forms. Furthermore, it recommended providing extensive written feedback when assessing graduation projects to substantiate the assessment more effectively and, in this way, to help students develop further at the start of their professional career. The panel also recommended ensuring better coordination between the information in the handbooks and in the assessment forms.

As to the actions to safeguard and improve assessments of the IB programme (requirement 2), the panel recommended the study programme to draw up and implement concrete plans aimed at safeguarding the quality of regular assessments of the IB programme, with specific attention to knowledge assessments. In respect of these assessments, the panel recommended organising activities that contribute to a higher success rate of them.

Recovery Plan

After the audit in February 2020 the study programme formulated a detailed Recovery Plan. The plan was drafted with intensive consultation of all stakeholders and approved by the Programme Committee (*Opleidingscommissie*). The recovery trajectory has been monitored by a steering committee, consisting of representatives of all bodies involved. The Recovery Plan consists of detailed plans to meet the requirements as laid down by the panel to meet the generic quality on standard 3. It starts with an adequate analysis of the state of affairs at that time regarding standard 3. It mentions clear programme interventions to safeguard and improve the final assessments of IBMS and IBL, the assessments of IB and the future final assessments of IB. In the Recovery Plan an extensive system for quality assurance of assessments is presented to support these interventions. This system includes several assurance mechanisms involving the relevant bodies within the study programme, such as the Programme Committee, Exam Committee, Test Committee, Graduation Committee, Curriculum Committee and Management. Furthermore, an elaborate communication and consultation structure is included to ensure active consultation and participation of all stakeholders, from students to examiners. Specific reference is made to the facilitation of the relevant (bodies of) stakeholders to help them to make the recovery a success. The above-mentioned measures have been made concrete in a detailed action plan consisting of 23 actions.

Execution of Recovery Plan and results

After the Recovery Plan had been approved by Programme Committee, it took some time, due to internal circumstances, before the execution of the Recovery Plan was entered upon. The new management of the study programme, which was installed at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, actively took up this challenge, together with the project leader. The new management took the proposed actions of the Recovery Plan in a broader perspective to make changes in the study programme as a whole, with more structure, formalisation and alignment within the study programme as major goals. The formation of one team operating for both locations (Emmen and Leeuwarden) has been another major goal. The composition of the team was to be adjusted to broaden the expertise within the team. Furthermore, it was decided to develop a new curriculum, IB 2.0. The panel is positive about this strong and sensible broad approach.

Results with respect to the first requirement

As to the first requirement, “Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the final assessments of the IBMS and IBL study programmes”, the panel has established the following results. The panel has studied several final assessments of IBL and IBMS of the last two years and the related assessments forms, completed by the examiners. The panel has noticed that the study programme uses uniform assessments forms, which have become better structured and more insightful. The panel has also established that the information in the handbooks of the modules connect with the criteria in the assessment forms. Calibration of the assessment of the end works has been intensified and has become common practice. Examiners whom the panel interviewed, mentioned that these calibrations are very useful and help them to improve the assessments and improve the alignment between assessors. Some students, however, have indicated that there could still be more alignment between the first and second examiner. Based on the assessment forms the panel studied, it is of the opinion that the filling in and uploading of the assessment forms can be further improved, also adding more detailed feedback. From the discussions with management and members of the Exam Committee and the Test Committee, the panel concludes that the study programme is aware of this. The management of the study programme has not hesitated to take responsibility in case individual examiners repeatedly failed to deliver proper support of their grading.

Results with respect to the second requirement

The actions in relation to the second requirement, “Sufficient adequate and executed actions that safeguard and improve the assessment of the IB programme, explicitly including knowledge test and sufficient concrete plans to safeguard the final assessment of the IB study programme” have resulted in the following outcomes. The panel has studied a representative selection of written assessments of the IB programme, including several knowledge tests, and related assessment forms. According to the panel, the assessments meet the standards of bachelor assessments and meet the requirements of validity, reliability and transparency.

The assessment forms of the IB assessments are sufficiently structured and insightful, like those of the final assessments mentioned above. They also connect sufficiently with the learning goals of the modules. However, also in these cases the panel is of the opinion that there is room for further improvement as to adequately filling in the forms, uploading them properly and providing sufficient feedback. Students assess the quality of the feedback they get for their tests and exams as sufficient. However, also in relation to the IB assessments they sometimes notice differences between examiners, as became clear during the panel discussion with students. It should be noted, however, that the number of students’ complaints about the filling in of assessments forms has declined in the last two years, based on the figures presented by the Examination Committee. The study programme has planned to continue the regular calibration of assessments between examiners and the panel encourages this. Together with the lecturers, the panel is positive about the pre-calibration sessions between lecturers before the start of a module. These are especially important to help speaking the same educational language.

In 2020 the panel expressed concern about the failure rate of the knowledge tests. One of the actions taken to tackle this problem, was to hire more experienced experts for various knowledge areas, as a result of which the study programme no longer has to rely on other departments of NHL Stenden to cover all key knowledge areas of the curriculum. All expertise areas are now

covered by at least two lecturers within the team. Furthermore, more attention has been paid to the didactics of the modules. These actions have not led to an immediate improvement of the pass rates, but they have resulted in greater student satisfaction as reflected in the student evaluations and in the panel discussion with students.

The study programme has developed a new graduation project for IB, which was implemented in February 2022. This development was also carried out in close cooperation with the Graduation Committee, the Examination Committee, the IB Advisory Board, the NHL Stenden Professor of Research, internal and external educational experts. Students were also regularly updated and information sessions were held to prepare them for the organisation, planning and requirements of the new graduation project. The panel spoke with two IB students who had just started with the new graduation project. They said that they felt well prepared for their graduation phase. The panel has studied the syllabus of the new Graduation Project and is positive about its set-up. The Graduation Project is an applied research project for an IB-organisation. Students prove end-level qualification for the IB Programme by analysing a complex business problem and trying to find a solution for the problem in an international business setting. The solution is to be presented as an advice or design. Guidance is provided on the student's initiative by a Graduation Supervisor of the study programme and the Company Mentor. In addition, there are specific supporting workshops and consultancy sessions.

The graduation trajectory consists of several go/no go-moments. The graduation project is assessed by two examiners (four eyes-principle). They assess the graduation project report, first independently from each other and through consultation have to arrive at a joint grade. Secondly, they jointly grade the oral defence of the project. The panel has studied the assessment forms of the new graduation project and finds them sufficiently structured and clear. In conclusion, the panel is of the opinion that the new IB graduation project provides a sound foundation to safeguard the final assessment of the IB programme.

General results

To meet the two above-mentioned requirements the study programme took several general measures. The panel judges the scope and quality of these measures positively. First, the quality assurance practices have been made more systematic, with clear roles of the committees mentioned above and relevant stakeholders. An important element of the quality assurance system is the evaluation cycle, with each module always evaluated in the same way by an independent person, who was not involved with the module at hand. The students whom the panel met, were positive about how they are involved in the quality assurance of the study programme. They pointed out clear examples of outcomes of evaluations which have resulted in positive changes, such as better coordination between examiners.

The recovery trajectory has also been supported by extensive professionalisation with respect to student assessment. All examiners are now, and have to be, BEQ-qualified (Basic Examination Qualification – *BKE*). All members of the Examination Committee and Test Committee are SEQ-qualified (Senior Examination Qualification – *SKE*) or training to be. The frequently held calibration sessions about assessments also play an important role in further professionalisation, in addition to their role in quality assurance. A major result of the professionalisation activities is that examiners work with the test cycle.

Several committees have played, and still play, an important part in working on the improvements of the assessments. The Programme Committee has approved the Recovery Plan in June 2020 and since then has provided solicited and unsolicited advice on all matters regarding this plan. The chair of the Programme Committee has also been a member of the steering committee of the recovery trajectory. She and another member of the Programme Committee have told the panel that the study programme has involved the Programme Committee actively all the time in this trajectory. Students are also positive how the Programme Committee continuously kept students up to date about the developments of the recovery trajectory.

Both the Examination Committee and Test Committee have proved to be essential and effective in the recovery trajectory, according to the panel. There is one Examination Committee for IBMS, IBL and IB, which holds combined meetings for both locations. The Examination Committee has standardised all its procedures and has created one central point of information with an intranet website. Furthermore, the Examination Committee has formulated examiner qualifications and a letter of appointment of examiners was introduced. The Examination Committee closely monitors the test reviews carried out by the Test Committee. This also holds for the reviews by the Graduation Committee of the graduation projects. Topics in these reviews include procedures and the completeness of forms. One of these reviews concerned an external review by the Lectorate Research at NHL Stenden. Outcomes of these reviews have led to recommendations to the management of the study programme to further tighten the rules on completing assessment forms. For the near future, the Examination Committee has initiated the evaluation of the procedure and completeness of forms of the new IB Graduation Project. Also at the Examination Committee's initiative, the Lectorate of Research of NHL Stenden will review the scope and suitability of the outcomes of the Graduation Project for the IB profession. Finally, there are concrete plans for peer-reviews of graduation projects between the IB-programmes of Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences and NHL Stenden.

The Test Committee was installed in October 2019 and reports to the Examination Committee. Its chair is also a member of the Examination Committee. An educationalist of the NHL Stenden educational department is also part of the Test Committee. After some initial uncertainty about its role and tasks, the position of the Test Committee is now clear, with the following main tasks: reviewing tests and assessments forms, monitoring calibrations and professionalisation activities with respect to student assessment and giving advice to management and the Examination Committee on topics related to student assessment. The Test Committee also functions as a sounding board for examiners. It works on the basis of an annual review plan and has developed comprehensive checklists for the review of tests. In the last two years the Test Committee has reviewed various types of tests, with special focus on knowledge tests. It has, for example, developed and implemented a systematic review process for knowledge tests in advance. It has also reviewed the assessment forms of the graduation projects from the IBL- and IBMS-programmes. The Test Committee reports the outcomes of its reviews to the Examination Committee, (individual) examiners and the management of the study programme. According to its year plan 2021-2022 it will continue the reviews as mentioned above with the addition of the review of a sample of five new graduation projects of IB. Furthermore, for the near future, the Test Committee, together with the Examination Committee, will be actively involved in the redesign of the testing and assessment programme of the new IB curriculum 2.0.

Based on recent reports of both committees and the meeting with both chairs and some of their

members, the panel is impressed by the quality of the work of both committees. Their members are very knowledgeable, pro-active and both committees have a firm position within the study programme. They are also actively involved in the development of the new IB graduation phase and student assessment of the new curriculum. Students are positive about their contacts with the Examination Committee. The examiners highly value both committees. Together with the panel, the examiners are very positive about the rotating membership of examiners of the Test Committee. This helps for better understanding of the necessity of using proper assessment procedures.

The Graduation Committee is active in the field of reviewing graduation products, organizing calibration sessions about graduation products and giving advice to graduation supervisors. It has also been active in the development of the new IB graduation phase. In relation to the other committees, its position and main tasks are, however, still somewhat unclear to the panel. The panel has gathered that the management of the study programme supports this view. There are initial plans to merge the Graduation Committee with the Curriculum Committee, which oversees the IB curriculum as a whole. The panel would like to support this.

To conclude, the quality assurance system and the combination of committees work adequately and positively for the further improvement of student assessment. There is sufficient alignment between all actors and parties involved, with still room for further improvement. The management of the study programme plays an active and good role in coordinating and initiating further efforts. It frequently and regularly meets with all the relevant bodies and stakeholders. It has also seen to it that the committees are properly facilitated. During the site visit, the panel has established that the management team has the full and wholehearted support of the students and lecturers.

Appendices

1. Programme of Site Visit

Time	Theme	Participants
11:00– 13:00	Welcome panel, presentation by programme management and work lunch	Panel + Management
13:00 – 13:30	Dialogue with students and alumni	Students and alumni
13:45 – 14:30	Dialogue with examiners	Examiners
15:00 – 15:45	Dialogue safeguarding committees + coordinators of the programmes to be phased out (IBL Emmen, IBL Leeuwarden and IBMS)	Exam committee Test committee Programme committee Graduation committee
16:00 – 16:30	Dialogue with recently appointed lecturers	Recently appointed lecturers
16:30 – 17:00	Dialogue management	Management
17:00 – 17:45	Consultation panel	Panel members
17:45 – 18:00	Preliminary findings	All interested

2. Documents Examined

- State of Affairs International Business, February 2022
- NQA Rapport visitatie International Business NHL Stenden Hogeschool, april 2020
- NVAO Accreditatiebesluit bestaande opleiding hbo-bachelor International Business van NHL Stenden Hogeschool, augustus 2020
- Recovery Plan IB, June 2020
- Role of the Programme Committee in the recovery process of International Business at NHL Stenden, March 2022
- Workplan Programme Committee of International Business 2021-2022
- IB Team Member List
- Test Policy IB 2021-2022
- Internal Rules and Regulations Examination Committee International Business
- Annual Report Examination Committee IB 2019-2020
- Annual Report Examination Committee IB 2020-2021
- Presentation Examination Committee IB for team meeting, February 2022
- Letter of Appointment Examiner 2021-2022
- Exemption Policy Examination Committee IB 2021-2022
- List of Examiners IB NHL Stenden 2021-2022
- Year Plan 2019-2020 Test Committee IB
- Annual Report & Year Plan 2020-2021 Test Committee IB
- Mid-term Report & Year Plan 2021-2022 Test Committee IB
- Test Committee Proposal – Testing and Assessment Improvements IB, January 2022
- Representative selection of Test Committee checklists for assessments, including final assessments
- Representative selection of Test Reviews by the Test Committee, including Test Reviews of end works
- Teaching and Examination Regulations of:
 - o IBL Emmen, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022
 - o IBL Leeuwarden, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022
 - o IBMS, 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022
 - o IB 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022
- Representative selection of tests with related assessment forms, including end works, among which the end works of one IBMS graduate from NHLS Stenden Qatar
- Module manuals, syllabuses and other study materials in Blackboard