

avans

QUALITY IN MOTION

QUALITY SYSTEM AT AVANS
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since 2006-7, Avans University of Applied Sciences has operated a comprehensive quality system. In response to various developments both inside and outside our organisation, the university decided to enrich this system. This enrichment process involved reformulating the vision of quality¹ and the associated quality system.

The enriched quality system builds upon elements of the 2006 system and supplements it with a number of new elements that will boost and promote the Avans quality system, such as substantive discussions and standards. The quality system focuses on teaching, research, valorisation and business practices and is tailored to meet the needs and requests of the various stakeholders. In this way, the comprehensive nature of the quality system is further reinforced.

All activities, working methods and resources required for this are described in our quality system. This system describes what we do in order to realise our ambitions. In this way, we make quality tangible, palpable, improvable, transferable and permanent, which enables us to build upon what we have already put in place.

Vision of quality

Overview

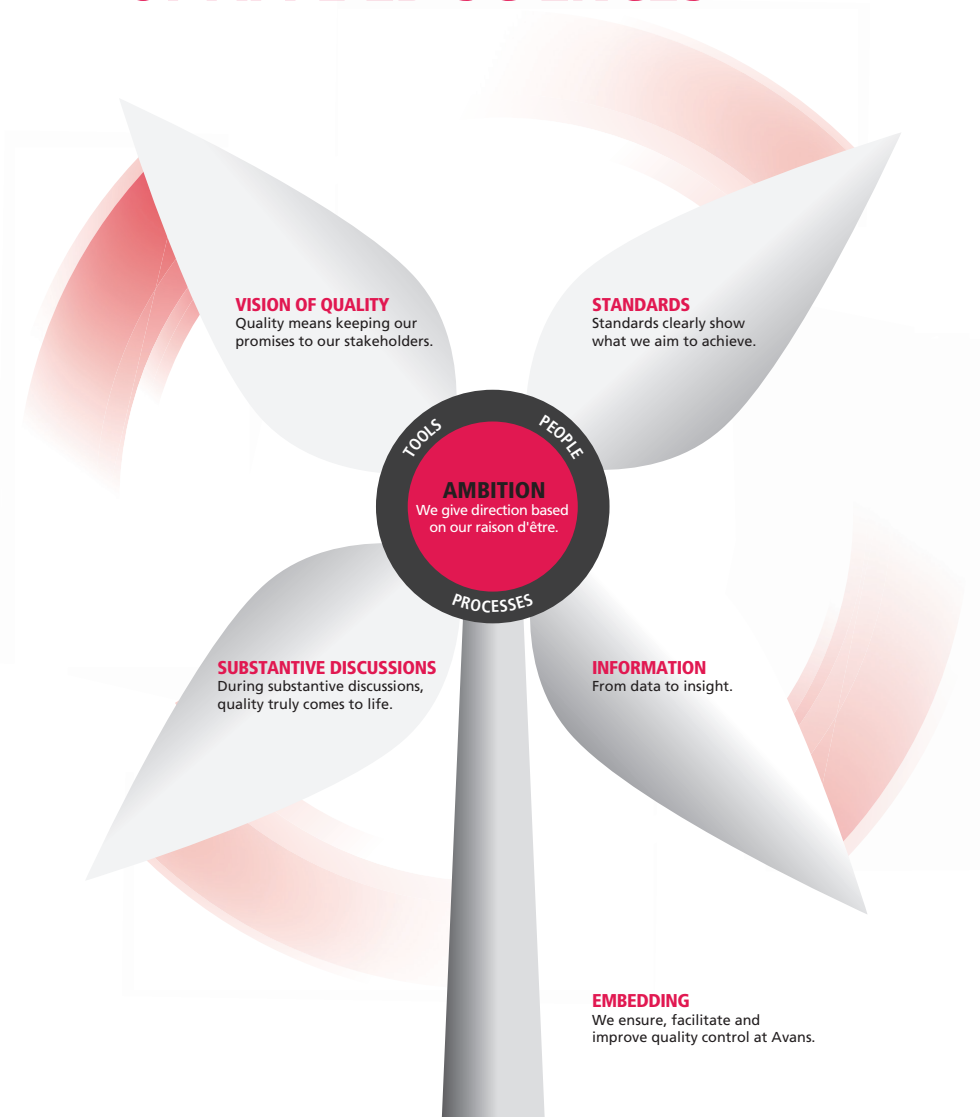
This document describes the various elements of the enriched quality system, which are all based on our vision of quality. Section 2 begins by sketching the framework of the quality system, and the subsequent sections describe an individual aspect of the system. Section 3 gives a rough description of the vision of quality. Section 4 describes our ambitions and how they will be realised. Section 5 explains how the substantive discussions are conducted. In Section 6, the standards are formulated. Section 7 explains how the information is collected and Section 8 addresses facilitation and embedding.

NB:

When we refer to organisational units, we mean the schools (including expertise centres), service units and the Centre of Expertise.

¹ See appendix: Vision of quality

2 QUALITY SYSTEM MODEL AVANS UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



The model on the left-hand page gives a visual overview of the quality system. The university's **ambition** is at the core of the model.

The circle of **people, resources and processes** surrounding the model represents how we convert our ambition into action. Together with our employees and resources, we carry out coherent activities (processes). This is how we work together to fulfil the promises made to our stakeholders.

The 'sails' in the model are what put the quality system 'in motion'. The **vision of quality** represents our collective line of thought.

Based on a set of **standards**, we establish how well we have kept our promises. For this purpose, we need to collect the right **information** and then use this data in the **substantive discussion** to give extra impulse to our perpetual quality-development process. During substantive discussions, quality truly comes to life. The sails are connected by our collective ambition.

In turn, the above elements are 'supported' in the model by a pillar of **facilitation and embedding**. After all, the quality of the quality-assurance system itself must be embedded to ensure it remains up to date, workable, maintainable and future-proof.

This model is inspired by the line of thought from Simons² and the INK model³.

² Simons, Robert L., Levers of Control. How managers use innovative control systems to drive strategic renewal, Harvard Business Review Press, 1994.

³ See <www.ink.nl> for more information.

3 VISION OF QUALITY

Quality means keeping our promises to our stakeholders.

The vision of quality is the collective line of thought on which the quality system is based. It answers elementary questions such as 'What is quality?', 'What is our quality culture?', 'Who is involved in the quality process and what role do they play?', and 'How do we make our quality visible?'. We make this quality concrete by using 'building blocks'. Within the building blocks, we describe what quality means to Avans, how we contribute to it and what effect it has. The building blocks are as follows:

We contribute to quality

To Avans, quality means keeping our promises. We have described the promises made to our stakeholders in our ambitions for Avans, such as our visions of education, research and valorisation.

We maintain a quality culture

Our quality culture is supported and shaped by our employees and students and constitutes part of our broader organisational culture. It is the culmination of the standards and values within Avans, and it contributes to the development of effective and efficient quality control. This boosts the quality of our education and research. Avans gives everybody the freedom to make a unique contribution to our quality culture based on their individual role.

We conduct substantive discussion

Substantive discussions are conducted between all parties involved. This is where quality really comes to life! Substantive discussions are conducted at all levels, both internally and externally. This is done in teams, between employees and their supervisors, and with our stakeholders, such as students and the professional field. These discussions are conducted based on qualitative and quantitative information.

We achieve transformation through quality

The effect of quality is reflected in the transformation of the students, who continually improve themselves by means of the knowledge, skills, and attitude that they develop. Exactly the same applies to our employees. They experience this by continually developing themselves professionally and contributing to an innovative and stimulating learning environment.

We involve our stakeholders

Students, lecturers and the learning environment need each other, inspire each other



and are closely interconnected. The learning environment and stakeholders influence and reinforce each other. We involve the stakeholders in the development, execution and improvement of our teaching and research. In this way, we learn what their experiences and expectations are. We systematically conduct discussions and request feedback.

We make quality clearly visible

This system describes what we do in order to realise our ambitions. In this way, we make quality tangible, palpable, improvable, transferable and permanent, by giving our employees the space, freedom and trust within the internal and external frameworks at Avans. These frameworks are translated into our own standards. They enable us to clearly and precisely define our goals and give us direction and energy to achieve them. Our standards are concretised by the use of indicators, which we use to measure and monitor all key data.

We do this together!

In order to learn, you need direction, information and security. This means that based on the commitment and involvement they feel, all Avans employees can actively and consciously share knowledge with each other and with stakeholders, and work together to realise our common goals. Our quality culture helps us to achieve and maintain the desired quality level. In this way, we make a real difference to Avans.

These building blocks are further expanded in our quality system. The full text of this vision is included in the appendices to this document.



4 AMBITION AND REALISATION

We give direction based on our raison d'être.

Avans gives leadership based on our ambitions and raison d'être. Our ambitions and the promises we make to our stakeholders are formulated in our 'Ambitie 2020' ambition statement and our visions of teaching, research and valorisation.⁴

We strive to create a quality culture that encourages every employee to take ownership, as this ensures Avans as a whole is in control of the process of realising our ambitions, aims and objectives. The circle of people, resources and processes is the section of the model that represents how we convert our ambition into action. Effective deployment of people and resources gives us the freedom to realise our ambitions. We work together to achieve the desired quality level by means of a series of cohesive and interconnected processes.

We operate quality-assurance cycles at all levels of Avans, all of which are based on the principle of continuous improvement (PDCA: Plan-Do-Check-Act). Together, these constitute the Avans P&C cycle.

⁴ See Ambition 2020, the Educational Vision, the Research Policy Memorandum and our Vision of Valorisation.

4.1 P&C CYCLE

The P&C cycle specifies the collective schedule for the quality-improvement process, including the dates and times of the formal substantive discussions (see Section 5). In this way, we work systematically and comprehensively on formulating our ambitions, how we will realise them and how the process will be managed and accounted for. This gives us the scope to conduct dialogue regarding not only the business practices, but also the quality of the teaching, research and valorisation. The P&C cycle consists of a number of supporting instruments.

Planning (giving direction)

- **Ambition plan:** At Avans, our ambitions, how we work towards them (strategy) and the selected pathway within this strategy are all recorded in an ambition plan at university level.
- **Business plan:** The ambition plan at university level is laid down into long-term business plans for the organisational units.
- **The frameworks for writing the business plan** are condensed into an annual planning letter that translates the ambition and vision into clearly formulated basic principles and financial frameworks.
- **Departmental and team plans:** each department/team within the schools/service units works in accordance with an operational departmental/team plan.

The P&C cycle also includes policy development. University policy – such as our HR policy and policy relating to resources and the process architecture – facilitates the activities that must be conducted in order to achieve the university's ambitions. All of this will be further elaborated during the implementation of the quality system.

Monitoring (learning and giving account)

- **Annual report:** Every calendar year, Avans delivers a clear, transparent report to its stakeholders regarding the realisation of its ambitions.
- **Management report:** The management report ensures accountability regarding progress in achieving the aims and objectives of the organisational units (as formulated in the business plan). This report serves as input for the substantive discussions at the appropriate level of the various organisational units. The management report contains data on business practices as well as the quality of the teaching, associated research and valorisation.

4.2 PDCA CYCLE

Our individual and collective quality-assurance efforts are conducted in accordance with the PDCA cycle. Based on the aims and objectives, plans are formulated (Plan) and executed in order to achieve results (Do). Subsequently, the results are measured and assessed in relation to the predefined aims, objectives and plans (Check), following which the plans and/or activities are adjusted based on analysis of the evaluated results (Act). The PDCA cycle plays out at every level within Avans: the university level, the organisational units, the departmental/team level and the individual level (performance review and evaluation cycle). The individual cycles operated within these different management levels are closely connected by directive line and the learning and accountability line.

Directive line

The planning cycle of the highest management level provides directives and guidelines to be used in formulating the plans, activities and result objectives of the management level below it. In turn, this provides directives and guidelines for the subsequent level, meaning the cycle works its way down from the university level to the level of individual employees.

Context: Avans's long-term policy, as recorded in the 'Ambitie 2020' ambition statement, provides input and frameworks for the business plans of all organisational units. These subsequently provide input and frameworks for the departments' plans, which in turn do the same for the team plans. The final step is then to translate these into targets for every individual employee and specify what he/she needs in order to achieve these targets.

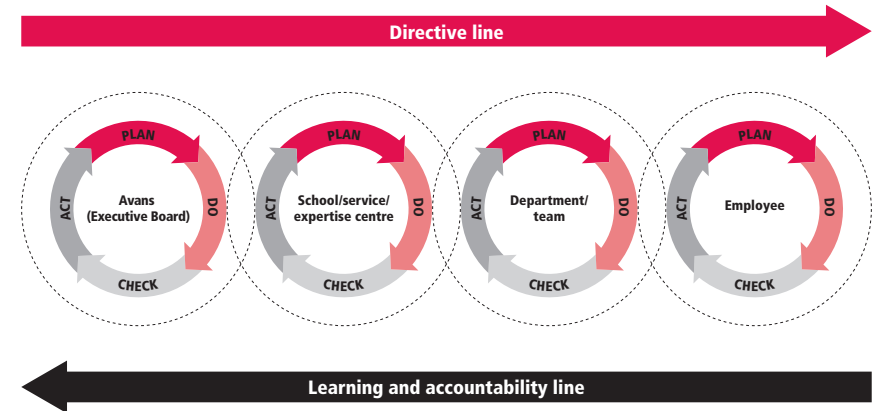
This ensures a consistent, continuous and coherent line of development from the strategic level to the tactical and operational levels, which ensures every single Avans employee is assigned a personal role to play in achieving the desired quality level for Avans.

Learning and accountability line

At every management level within Avans, this cycle is completed by measuring and evaluating the extent to which the objectives have been realised (Check) and then subsequently analysing the measurements and continually making improvements (Act)⁵. Closing the circle at one organisational level ensures accountability toward and provides input for the cycle of the level below. In this way, the sum of all cycles at all levels ultimately completes the circle at the Avans (university) level, and Avans always strives to ensure the whole is more than just the sum of its parts.

⁵ A sign that the various management levels are optimally connected is when broader trend-related observations are converted into policy decisions and follow-up plans at the upper management level.

The learning and accountability line also forms a consistent and continuous pathway from the operational level to the tactical level through to the strategic level. The relationship between the directive line and the learning and accountability line at the various levels is displayed in the following model:



The system of rotating circles within circles (the P&C cycle) not only ensures that the top level gives guidance to all of the levels below, but also that input rises up from the lower levels to the top level in order to improve Avans policy and processes. During the implementation of the quality system, all of the PDCA circles will be elaborated on at all levels.

Context: The performance interviews with various lecturers will monitor pedagogical development at Avans and help to identify any skills shortages that may develop. For example, it may be that the necessary improvements (e.g. participation in training activities) can be conducted as part of the team's own quality cycle. However, the improvements may also be outside this team's scope (responsibilities and authorisations). The conclusions and points for improvement stemming from the evaluation will be assessed at school level (by the School Boards). Based on the identified points for improvement, which are likely to relate to more than one team, the school will prioritise these points for improvement at the school level or translate them for the organisational level below it. Eventually, trend-based observations can be implemented into the formulation and execution of Avans policy.

5 SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSIONS

During substantive discussions, quality truly comes to life.

The 'substantive discussions' allow us to collectively interpret the qualitative and quantitative quality data at Avans. By reflecting on quality together with all stakeholders, we will gain valuable insight and learn important lessons. This is an important catalyst for the process of continual improvement.

5.1 WORKING METHOD

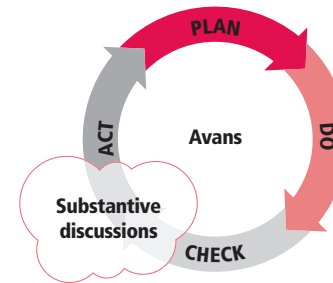
We conduct quality discussions at all levels of our organisation. The substantive discussions are held at fixed points during the quality-assurance cycles. They are arranged at all levels and between the different levels together with the various stakeholders and the Joint Consultative Council.

These discussions focus on the following four quality questions:

- Are we achieving our goals?
- Are we continually learning?
- Are we maintaining lessons learned?
- What opportunities and threats have we identified?

To answer these questions, we examine what is going well and what can be improved, after which we formulate follow-up action. These substantive discussions complete the PDCA circle, acting as the link between the 'Check' stage, in which we collect information, and the 'Act' stage, in which we take concrete steps to make the improvements. Input (qualitative and quantitative data) for the substantive discussions is provided by the 'Check' stage. This input is interpreted and explained during the discussions by reflecting (together with the stakeholders) on the degree to which the standards are being met. During this process, the indicators derived from these standards (see Section 6) will clearly show the degree of quality that has been achieved. The results of the substantive discussions serve as fuel for the 'Act' phase.

By conducting these substantive discussions regularly and structurally, we ensure the information gathered is interpreted correctly by all parties. We combine the data and the dialogue to enable informed decision-making on whether to continue on the path we are following, to adjust the course slightly or to change direction entirely. **Vision of quality**



Substantive discussions recur periodically both horizontally and vertically. They can be conducted either informally or as formally scheduled components of the P&C cycle (although the latter only applies to the vertical substantive discussions). This enables us to connect the cycles and ensure the visibility of our quality.

These methods allow us to fulfil the basic principles of transparency and stakeholder involvement. Effective substantive discussions provide valuable output that is shared within the organisation.

5.2 PREPARATION OF CONTENT AT VARIOUS LEVELS

For effective substantive discussions, input is required regarding:

- the four quality questions
- the degree to which the standards and indicators are being satisfied (see Sections 6 and 7)
- reflection on the previous substantive discussion

In order to interpret the management information and adequately incorporate it into the substantive discussions, we will use new techniques to gain insight into this data. Preferably, this should be done via a compact visual overview of management information within the various units and at the different organisational levels (e.g. on several sheets of A3). This overview will be created using data on compliance with the standards in addition to specific topics and indicators applicable to the unit and level in question. This data is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and contains data on both the solidity of the foundations (see Section 6) and the realisation of the ambitions.

The aggregated results of the formal substantive discussions will provide input for improvement (Act) and for similar discussions at higher management levels (see Section 4). For this reason, it is important that these results are recorded and shared. Furthermore, these results are an important source of information for the comprehensive quality review, which gives insight into how well the quality system is working (see Section 8).



6 STANDARDS

Standards clearly show what we aim to achieve.

The standards are derived from our ambitions and reflect the desired performance level in relation to our ambitions. In other words, they are the desired results that correspond to our ambitions. This enables us to measure and monitor whether we are doing the right things and whether we are doing them well. These standards provide input, guidance and explanation of the agendas for the substantive discussions. The standards indicate the environment in which we operate within Avans.

6.1 AVANS'S STANDARDS

At the Avans level, three standards have been formulated in relation to the students, lecturers and learning environment. These reflect the core of Avans's ambitions. During the realisation of these standards, it is vital that their foundations are solid. This means that every standard must contain both elements of generic quality and Avans's ambitions. The Avans quality system is emphatically based on well-founded trust, a fact that is clearly visible during the substantive discussions (see Section 5).

Student: Avans challenges students to get the very most out of their talents by selecting the optimum learning pathway to maximise their professional and personal development. Upon completion of this process, they become fully competent and future-proof budding professionals capable of making a contribution to society.

Lecturer: Lecturers get the most out of themselves and others using state-of-the-art professional knowledge and teaching skills. They successfully encourage and guide their students to optimally develop their talent and serve as an example with regard to people, planet, profit and prosperity.

Learning Environment: The learning environment created by Avans facilitates small-scale, vocational and differentiated teaching and research. This durably designed learning environment promotes interaction between students and lecturers and encourages individual talent development. It also serves to optimise our collaboration with the professional field and knowledge partners and to valorise knowledge. The learning environment is supported by effective and efficient business practices.

AVANS'S STANDARDS

6.2 INDICATORS

The standards are translated into a limited number of indicators: previous experience tells us that establishing too many indicators has an adverse effect. Indicators are qualitative and quantitative data that show to what degree a standard has been realised or achieved. The indicators are geared towards each other to ensure a compact and conveniently arranged set of indicators that give insight into all management levels: institution, organisational units, departments and staff members. By linking indicators to standards, the information is given a mutually agreed score.

These indicators therefore show whether the foundations are solid and whether the ambitions are being achieved. During the implementation of the quality system, the indicators will be further elaborated for each unit and level.

Our standards are specified by the use of indicators, which we use to measure and monitor both quantitative and qualitative information. **Vision of quality**

7 INFORMATION

From data to insight.

Within Avans, we make use of various sources of data to gain insight into the progress we are making towards our goals and how satisfied the stakeholders are with our progress. In the following paragraphs, we describe the various measurements we take within Avans with regard to three different lines of approach: satisfaction surveys, internal/external assessment and management information. All of these measurements will be adjusted and elaborated further during the implementation of the quality system.

7.1 SATISFACTION SURVEYS

We constantly measure the satisfaction of our stakeholders. On page 20, you can find examples of the type of satisfaction surveys we conduct with the various stakeholders.

This list of instruments is not yet complete, which is why we refer to them as examples. These instruments will be evaluated during the implementation of the quality system, based on which they will be adjusted, improved, further developed and optimally geared towards one another. Especially with regard to block evaluations and the PFACs, the source (i.e. instrument) remains the same but the content must be constantly improved. The composition of the entire set of instruments is very dynamic, which is necessary to continually satisfy the ever-changing range of wishes and requirements.

In addition to the aforementioned instruments for measuring satisfaction with certain aspects of teaching and work, instruments will also be developed in order to measure satisfaction with research, business practices, internal services and management. These surveys will be conducted at least once a year. The instruments include systematic evaluation of (i) lecturers by students, (ii) School Boards by staff members and (iii) the Executive Board by the School Boards.

Target group	Instrument	Explanation
Student	• NSS	The National Student Survey is a large-scale annual study that asks students to give their opinions on the quality of their education.
	• Block evaluations and student focus groups	Following a completed study period, the schools conduct block evaluations to measure the students' satisfaction with the teaching provided during the block in question. Some schools also organise student focus groups.
Alumni	• HBO-monitor	The HBO monitor - an instrument used to measure the position of graduates on the job market and the degree to which the programmes are relevant to professional practice - is sent to our alumni every year.
	• Own network and alumni surveys	Many schools actively maintain contact with alumni, often via study societies. In addition to the HBO monitor, we can both actively and passively use this network to gain insight into the satisfaction of former students with our programmes.
Staff members	• Employee-satisfaction	At Avans, we conduct an employee-satisfaction survey once every two years to find out how happy our staff members are with the organisation and various aspects of their job.
Professional field	• Professional-field advisory councils	Every school/programme has a professional-field advisory council (PFAC) consisting of a representative cross-section of the professional field. PFACs advise the departments regarding the professional profiles, relevance to the professional field, programme curricula and other relevant developments within the profession. The PFAC can also give insight into the added value to society provided by Avans's alumni.
	• Evaluations of internship/graduation companies	The schools/departments also assess the satisfaction of the organisations at which students complete internships and graduation projects.

7.2 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Internal assessment

The internal audits allow us to monitor the quality of various different aspects and provide input for the continuous improvement of our results and processes. This information enables us to learn lessons. The audits are conducted as part of the annual auditing and policy-evaluation process established by the Executive Board. The auditing process focuses on both business practices and primary results/processes. In addition to the internal audits, we also use scans to improve the quality of the various results and processes at the different levels and within the different units. These scans may be either optional or compulsory, depending on the aspect in question and in all cases, the results of the scans are for advisory purposes.

External assessment

External supervisory bodies also provide insight into the quality of our primary and support processes. Examples of this include:

- Accreditation of programmes and the Institutional Quality Audit, conducted by the NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) every six years.
- Independent external assessment of research units (BKO).
- Other external audits: Investors in People (HR), ISO (international quality standards), AISHE (sustainability).
- The audit report.

Most of these external assessments are required by law. Others, such as Investors in People and ISO, are optional and the organisational unit in question is free to make use of the instrument if desired.

7.3 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Information is recorded and processed at all management levels within the organisation. Every source of information has its own aggregation level and rhythm, from strategic to operational, from cyclical to real-time and from periodic to occasional.

During the conduct of our processes, qualitative and quantitative information is recorded and processed by our management-information system and displayed visually. The Business Intelligence Competence Centre (BICC) ensures this information is both stored and made available to the organisation of Avans. It can also be used for in-depth analysis and research, although for this purpose, it is vital that the information collected is aggregated at each level to ensure effective management. The aforementioned compact visual overview can serve as a powerful tool in this regard.



As mentioned earlier, this information facilitates the substantive discussions. In order to do this, it must be up-to-date, accurate and user-friendly.

8 EMBEDDING

Facilitating, improving and embedding our quality assurance.

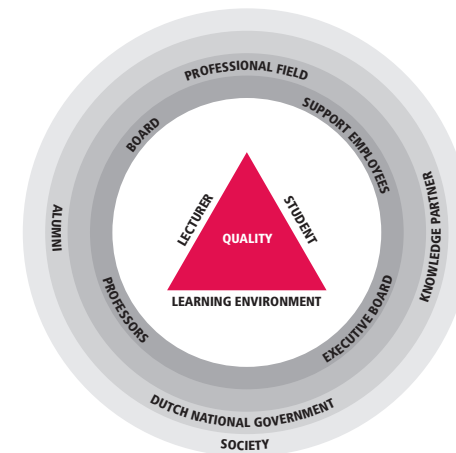
The quality of the quality-assurance system itself must be regularly assessed to ensure it remains up to date, workable, maintainable and future-proof.

8.1 EMBEDDING ON TWO LEVELS

The quality system is embedded at two different levels: the foundation level and the system level. At the foundation level, the quality-assurance efforts are embedded into the organisational units, while the system level focuses on the universal standard of quality that Avans pursues at the university level.

Embedding at the foundation level via quality plans for organisational units

In order to embed day-to-day quality assurance into the organisational units, every unit must translate the quality system into a quality plan. This quality plan describes the concrete substance of the various elements of the quality system (see Section 2) for that particular unit. Every organisational unit shapes the way the vision of quality relates to their unit (see Section 3), including how they give substance to their own stakeholder model as displayed in the diagram below. They also reflect on how the PDCA principle is complied with. The organisational units' quality plans must also specify how the document management is conducted.



Embedding at the system level via the comprehensive Avans quality-assurance review

In order to embed the Avans quality level, and therefore to ensure that our quality system functions effectively, we make use of the comprehensive review of the quality-assurance system. This system evaluation is based on both external and internal input.

Among other matters, the external input includes:

1. The institution assessment conducted by the NVAO: the institution quality-assurance assessment focuses on the evaluation of the quality system for the teaching provided at Avans. It assesses how the vision of teaching quality and policy derived from this vision are implemented, evaluated and adjusted if necessary.
2. The independent external assessment in accordance with the BKO (Sector Protocol for Quality Assessment of research-units). As part of the independent assessment in accordance with the BKO, the assessment committee will examine how well the quality system for the research-related organisational units is functioning (standard 5 of the BKO).
3. The management report compiled by the external auditor.



The internal input includes collected and analysed data such as student/employee-satisfaction survey results, results from the formal substantive discussions, management information, results from internal audits and results from the P&C cycle.

The analysed internal and external results of the various evaluations will be regularly and cohesively assessed in relation to previous policy objectives and improvement measures and within the context of internal and external developments encountered by Avans. This information will then be carefully examined in order to identify the underlying causes and connections, which in turn will provide the input for implementing the most fundamental improvements at the organisational level. We must emphasise that the process for the quality-assurance review has been designed to be both 'lean and mean' and the basic objective is to achieve an optimum balance between effort and comprehensive insight.

The Executive Board is responsible for commissioning the comprehensive quality-assessment review, and once this is done, it will be prepared by a panel of internal key figures. The results of this review will be discussed with the Executive Board and the School Boards and shared with the Avans Joint Consultative Council and the Supervisory Board in order to identify key improvements at the organisational and system levels.

In addition to internal staff members, external key figures will also be involved to take part in the periodic evaluation. The review will then be assessed by these external experts and key figures. This ensures that compartmentalisation and organisational myopia are avoided and that our quality is visibly reflected for the outside world to see.

In order to achieve optimal coherence between the various levels of the P&C cycle, the comprehensive review will be embedded into the Avans Long-Term Policy Cycle (repeats every four years) to ensure it is positioned at the highest aggregation level within the policy-development and implementation process. In the third year of every Long-Term Policy Cycle, the comprehensive evaluation will be prepared and conducted. This will ensure relevant substantive input is generated in order to establish the results of existing long-term policy and future policy that will be implemented for the next policy period. The assessment based on the comprehensive quality-assurance review can also be used to adjust and improve aspects of Avans's quality-assurance model or its supporting instruments.

8.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITH REGARD TO QUALITY CONTROL

In order to ensure the quality is embedded, we have defined a number of roles and responsibilities within Avans relating to the realisation and maintenance of quality. These vary from the roles of the Supervisory Board and the Executive Board to the responsibilities of every individual employee. All of these roles and responsibilities will be further elaborated during the implementation of the quality system.

8.3 FACILITATION

A number of preconditions have been defined in order to ensure the quality model works effectively, such as a professional quality culture, quality-oriented leadership and the provision of sufficient space, time and safety for ownership, personal interaction and communication. More extensive descriptions of these preconditions can be found in the vision of quality, which influences the following processes:

- Periodic discussion of developments and experiences between staff members responsible for quality assurance in order to exchange information and learn from each other.
- Provision of expert advice to organisational units: Schools, expertise centres and service units must be able to call upon expert advice during the execution of their own quality-assurance responsibilities in line with the Avans vision and working methods.
- Communication: Good internal and external communication plays an important role in boosting the quality culture and encouraging perpetual attention to continual improvement.

All of these aspects will be further elaborated during the implementation of the quality system.

APPENDIX: VISION OF QUALITY

A beautiful scene of a couple doing the tango: a heartfelt and passionate dance performed to the rhythm and melody of the unmistakably characteristic music. It's passion. It's art. It's freedom. And yet the tango still has its own unmistakable sound, rhythm, language and technique. By learning together, talking to each other, practising and gaining experience, the dancers develop their skills and their tango radiates more and more passion.

Education is also about passion, art and freedom. It's an extremely human process and every day can be different. However, education at Avans University of Applied Sciences also has its own unmistakable sound, rhythm, language and technique. By learning together, talking to each other, practising and gaining experience, Avans can get the very most out of all its stakeholders.

Just as the quality of the tango is determined by the dancers in the rhythm of the music, the quality of education is determined by the interplay between the students and lecturers in the learning environment. In other words: it takes three to tango!

Introduction

At Avans, quality is paramount and it captures everybody's imagination. If we wish to maintain, improve and future-proof our quality, then we must make everything we do visible by investigating, describing, analysing, discussing and further developing it. This vision of quality provides the impetus to do exactly this and describes our collective focus with regard to 2020.

In our vision, we give structure to quality using the 'building blocks of quality'. These building blocks symbolise the structure of the vision and show we are building upon the existing quality at Avans. Within the building blocks, we describe what quality means to Avans, how we contribute to it and what effect it has. We examine our quality culture and show how important it is to closely involve our stakeholders. We also explain how we make quality visible and what role the substantive discussions play in this process.

Building block 1: We contribute to quality

To Avans, quality means keeping our promises. We have described the promises made to our stakeholders in our ambitions for Avans, such as our visions of education, research and valorisation⁶.

We contribute to quality by:

- demonstrably achieving our goals: Avans monitors our progress and shows that we are realising our ambitions. This helps to make our quality visible.
- permanently learning and improving: Our continual learning process is exactly the attitude to learning that we instill in our students. This is a perpetual process.
- maintaining acquired knowledge: We firmly embed what we learn. This helps establish solid foundations.
- identifying opportunities and threats and taking appropriate action.

Building block 2: We maintain a quality culture

We strive to keep our promises. This is the source of our intrinsic drive to continually learn and develop together. Striving for quality is in our employees' DNA. Quality belongs to everyone and is only possible if every employee does their bit. The passion and commitment to achieving quality is both visible and tangible in our organisation.

Our quality culture is supported and shaped by our employees and students and constitutes part of our broader organisational culture. It is the culmination of the standards and values within Avans and it contributes to the development of effective and efficient quality control. This boosts the quality of our education and research. Avans gives everybody the freedom to make a unique contribution to our quality culture based on their individual role.

Our quality culture is characterised by a professional working environment that enables continual learning. For this purpose, leadership is needed that gives people the freedom to act. Our employees use this freedom to create, innovate, share and learn together. At all levels, people feel a sense of ownership for the work they perform. The employees are at the helm: they take responsibility and are accountable for what they do. They critically reflect on their work by initiating a discussion on it.

Our quality culture is also reflected in our learning environment, in which students are the owners of their own learning and personal development. Within the programme, they discuss the issue of effective education with the employees and feel jointly responsible for its realisation. Within Avans, students not only work towards their degrees, they also help to shape their degree programme and their own academic success.

Further reinforcement of our quality culture requires contributions from the parties involved, both internal and external. In this way, we keep each other on our toes! Trust is a vital factor in realising this culture. In this regard, we constantly ask ourselves what impact certain rules and systems have on our quality culture and whether we maintain enough of a human touch with regard to our students and employees.

Building block 3: We conduct substantive discussion

Substantive discussions are conducted between all parties involved. This is where quality really comes to life. Substantive discussions are conducted at all levels, both internally and externally. This is done in teams, between employees and their supervisors and with our stakeholders, such as students and the professional field. The substantive discussions involve both horizontal and vertical dialogue and are conducted based on qualitative and quantitative information. By doing this regularly and structurally, we ensure the information gathered is interpreted correctly by all parties. We combine the data and the dialogue to enable informed decision-making on whether to continue on the path we are following, to adjust the course slightly or to change direction entirely. The intention of these discussions is for everyone to learn as a team. Have we achieved the objectives? Have we found a solution to the identified risks? Have we seized upon the available opportunities? Have we implemented the right improvements? Can we maintain the lessons already learned while continuing to develop and innovate?

Building block 4: We achieve transformation through quality

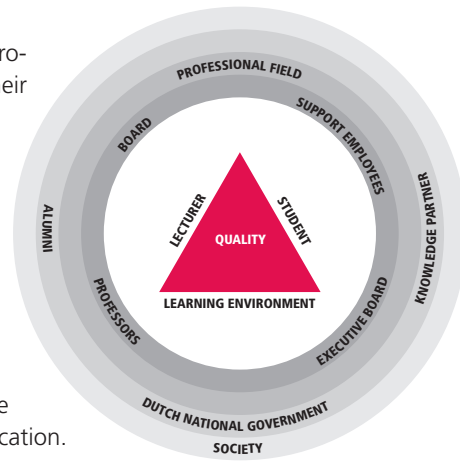
Avans trains its students to become future-proof professionals ready to enter the workforce. All students at Avans undergo a substantial transformation during their academic careers. With regard to education, the central focus is that our students are facilitated to optimally develop their talents. In other words, the effect of quality is reflected in the transformation of the students, who continually improve themselves by means of the knowledge, skills, and attitude that they develop. Exactly the same applies to our employees. They set the right example by continually developing themselves professionally and contributing to an innovative and stimulating learning environment.

⁶ See Ambition 2020, the Educational Vision, the Research Policy Memorandum and our vision of valorisation

Building block 5: We involve our stakeholders

At Avans, we achieve quality by focusing on the interplay between the students, lecturers, and learning environment: it takes three to tango. They inspire each other, are closely interconnected and need each other. The students not only work on their degree programmes, but also influence the development and conduct of the teaching. The lecturers not only teach, but also shape the way the education is provided and inspire the students. The learning environment is the interplay between the physical and virtual learning environment - both internal and external - that supports the teaching process. The learning environment and the stakeholders - who in the model are represented in the circles around the triangle - influence and reinforce each other.

The other stakeholders, such as the professional field and the alumni, take their place around the triangle of students, lecturers and learning environment. Although every stakeholder has their own different interests, positions and roles, all of them both experience and influence our quality. The professional field plays an essential role in this regard. At Avans, professionals are a vital part of the learning environment and directly contribute to the development and conduct of the education.



We know all of our stakeholders personally, both inside and outside Avans. At every level, we know how we relate to our stakeholders and weigh up their various interests. For this purpose, we use Avans' basic stakeholder model (see image). We can fulfil this basic model by conducting a stakeholder analysis.

Building block 6: We make quality clearly visible

To ensure our quality is clearly visible, we clearly demonstrate that our objectives have been met and that we took timely action to capitalise on opportunities and minimise risks. All activities, working methods and resources required for this are described in our quality system. This system describes what we do in order to realise our ambitions. In this way, we make quality tangible, palpable, improvable, transferable and permanent, which enables us to build upon what we have already put in place. This ensures our continual development. We do this by giving our employees the space, freedom and trust within the internal and external frameworks at Avans.

These frameworks are translated into our own standards. By means of a clear structure of standards, we describe the essence of how we fulfil the expectations of the stakeholders. They enable us to clearly and precisely define our goals and give us direction and energy to achieve them. They are derived from our ambition and visions of education, research and valorisation and tie in with existing external standards. We also have a system of standards for our business operations. Our standards are concretised by the use of indicators, which we use to measure and monitor both quantitative and qualitative information. This allows us to answer the questions 'are we doing the right things?' and 'are we doing these things well?' In this way, we demonstrate the extent to which we have developed in the direction we are aiming for and whether we can maintain the lessons we have learned. By sharing knowledge with each other and demonstrably embedding what we learn, we ensure we don't waste our time reinventing the wheel over and over again.

At every level within Avans, information on the realisation of our objectives is collected and assessed for our stakeholders. This enables us to coordinate the quality circles at every management level within education, research, valorisation and business operations to ensure they are optimally compatible and mutually benefit each other.

The discussions are characterised by openness, clarity and security. Common expectations and genuine interest cultivate reciprocity and sharing, which enables us to generate commitment, inspiration, opportunities and solutions so that we may realise our ambitions.

Quality summed up in one word: together!

In order to learn, you need direction, information and security. This means that based on the commitment and involvement they feel, all Avans employees can actively and consciously share knowledge with each other and with stakeholders, and work together to realise our common goals. This enables us to get the very most out of our professional environment and reinforce each other and the organisation. Continual attention is paid to this factor. Our quality culture helps us to achieve and maintain the desired quality level. In this way, we make a real difference to Avans.

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