

ACCREDITATION OF RESEARCH SCHOOLS – INTRODUCTION

This document provides an introduction for the accreditation procedure for research schools. Applications for accreditation are reviewed by the ECOS (Erkenningscommissie Onderzoekscholen or Research school accreditation committee). It explains how this procedure relates to research evaluations by national or international peers in accordance with the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) for publicly funded research drawn up by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy for Arts and Sciences (KNAW). This text provides an introduction to three other documents: the application form, the Accreditation Protocol and the Regulations of the Accreditation Committee. All of these documents can be found at www.knaw.nl/ecos.

All these documents are in English, and the *Erkenningscommissie Onderzoekscholen (ECOS)* is further referred to as the Accreditation Committee. However, applications for accreditation can be written in either in English or Dutch at the applicant's discretion.

A. Goals of accreditation of research schools

The accreditation procedure can be used by academic units providing PhD training. Applications can be submitted for research schools or graduate schools, whether they are organized via collaboration between universities, between departments of the same university, or organized within one department. Goals of the accreditation process are:

1. To provide an independent quality stamp for academic units that offer well organised and productive PhD training in a setting of good and sufficiently focussed research, and by doing so contribute to the national and international visibility and recognition of these schools.
2. To provide advice for further improvements of these schools, via discussion with representatives of the school (including students), resulting in a written advisory report accompanying the accreditation decision.

B. Relation between ECOS and SEP evaluations

In order to reach these goals, the Accreditation Committee's main focus is on aspects concerning training and supervision, and on the academic environment necessary for productive training. The latter obviously includes the quality and focus of the research environment. To check the research quality, the accreditation committee will use Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) reports, which are evaluations conducted by international panels of experts.

For accreditation, applicants provide either one SEP evaluation report covering the whole of the research school, or parts of different SEP evaluations, covering the research groups in the school to be accredited (the latter can be the case in a school set up between universities or departments). This information should give the accreditation committee sufficient grounds to decide whether a research programme is adequate and coherent enough to serve as a fruitful environment for a successful PhD programme.

While the international panels conducting the SEP evaluations also need to discuss the PhD training of a research unit under assessment, the main focus in SEP evaluations is research

quality and relevance. The main focus in accreditation of schools by ECOS is quality of the PhD programme, including training and supervision.

C. Re-accreditation and set up of peer review of research schools (via SEP)

The criteria for initial accreditation of new research schools also apply for re-accreditation of established schools (every six years), but the ECOS protocol prescribes some additional criteria for re-accreditation as well. An important condition for re-accreditation is that the application must include a report on the school's performance and changes that might have occurred in its structure or policy during the previous period of accreditation. This report is to be supported by an evaluation by an international peer review committee.

Such a report should be not older than three years before the latest date for submission of the ECOS (re-)accreditation application. The structure and performance of such a peer review of a research school must comply with the guidelines laid down in the *Standard Evaluation Protocol*. These guidelines cover aspects such as the selection of the members of the review committee and the committee's work programme during a site visit.

The school can comply by utilizing an existing SEP evaluation or existing SEP evaluations produced during the regular Dutch research evaluation cycles. If multiple existing SEP evaluations on the various research groups in the school are used to cover the research and education programmes of the entire research school, the reports must be presented in a transparent and cohesive form in the request for re-accreditation.

When using existing SEP evaluations is not possible or if the school wishes to proceed otherwise, the condition that a peer review report must be attached to the application for re-accreditation can be complied with by arranging for a single evaluation of the entire research school prior to the submission of an application for re-accreditation.

The general procedure for such an evaluation is described in the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2009-2015. However, for the accreditation procedure, only those aspects mentioned on the ECOS form have to be covered. It is particularly important to instruct the peer review committee to evaluate the quality of the research programme and the education and supervision programme in its report. Its assessment should take into account the school's past performance and its proposed policy.

Research Schools Accreditation Committee, April 2010