

Quality dialogues: Connecting and Improving

Programme Plan for Strengthening EUR Educational Quality Assurance
2024–2027

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1. Context

The ITK (institutional quality assurance audit) is a periodic, external and independent assessment by a panel of experts, under the direction of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), of an institution's internal educational quality assurance. This assessment determines whether EUR's internal quality assurance system in conjunction with our quality culture ensures that our vision of good education (educational vision) is being realised.

ITK 3.0 focuses on the following question: *how does the institution, and each level within it, work cyclically, sustainably and collaboratively to secure, improve and develop its education?*

In recent years, there has been a broad debate in the Netherlands about revising the accreditation system to allow more room for institutional autonomy ('*eigen regie*'). The ultimate realisation of those intentions would be a system based on 'institutional accreditation' (*Instellingsaccreditatie*). Due to lack of political and public support, those plans have been shelved for the time being. This new system will not become a reality before 2030. Nevertheless, stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), NVAO and Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) share the ambition to consolidate the **focus on ownership and (self-)confidence** in the system. The shift in emphasis of ITK 3.0 is committed to this focus.

The NVAO assessment frameworks (both for the ITK and for programme accreditation) are composed of *open standards*. These standards do not take a normative definition of quality as a starting point, but form a framework within which the **concept of quality is discursively established within the institution, faculty and programme, in the context of a dialogue between various stakeholders**. The open nature of the framework underlines the institution's autonomy and its responsibility for quality and leaves room for variation in the design and implementation of educational policy, including between different parts of the institution.¹ This fits perfectly with the way we have been working at EUR for years.

With the focus of ITK 3.0, attention shifts from the Executive Board being *in control* of educational quality, towards a *quality culture*, and thus to quality dialogues at the various organisational levels operating in a cohesive way. Quality dialogues already play a central role in EUR's approach to quality assurance, and we aim to further connect and improve them with this programme plan. ITK 3.0 is a benchmark for EUR to see whether our quality assurance system and quality culture are working in synergy to stimulate and facilitate ownership at the various levels. It also provides an opportunity to confidently demonstrate our achievements to our stakeholders.

By participating in ITK 3.0, EUR is eagerly accepting the explicit invitation from OCW and NVAO to take maximum ownership of internal quality assurance.

¹ See the NVAO explanation of ITK 3.0: https://www.nvaio.net/files/attachments/10072/Instellingstoets_ITK_3_0.pdf.

This programme plan was drawn up by the team Education & Quality Assurance (Academic Affairs) and gives effect to EUR's ambition not only to successfully complete ITK 3.0 by 2026 and obtain an extension of its *ITK recognition*, but also to further strengthen EUR's quality assurance system and quality culture based on its own vision.

2. Ambitions

This programme plan focuses on the realisation and operationalisation of a new quality assurance vision in which the principle of ownership of educational quality is given meaning from the perspective of an organisational culture that can be characterised as *consciously decentralised* and in which *informed dialogue* is central. It is EUR's ambition to exercise internal control over quality assurance by these means and thus ensures successful completion of ITK 3.0. We will do this by linking internal and external quality assurance to the maximum extent possible.

Preparing for ITK 3.0 gives direction to the continued development of an internal quality assurance system, which must be strong enough to bear the responsibility of taking control and flexible enough to make maximum use of the scope for ownership it creates. EUR is starting from a good position: because of the governance and organisational culture that characterises our institution, we have long been familiar with the productive tension between autonomy (own initiative) and alignment (cooperation). Looking at the current operation of the internal quality assurance system, several strengths can be noted:

- **Consciously decentralised:** EUR's approach, which is based on initiative and cooperation, works.² The themes of the educational vision are recognised and supported across the breadth of the organisation and given meaning *from the bottom up*. The decentralised quality policy, as further developed in the context of the Quality Agreement (HEQA) plans³, gives ample scope for faculty autonomy, initiative and entrepreneurship, while at the same time stimulating cohesion, collaboration and horizontal learning within the framework of an interfaculty thematic innovation calendar linked to the educational vision (communities of practice, Community for Learning & Innovation). EUR has a robust interim programme evaluation (*Tussentijdse Opleidingsevaluatie*, TOE) system with plenty of room for decentralised ownership.

Midterm review panel (2022): "The panel noticed overall much enthusiasm and willingness to work together. EUR invested in the past years in the further building of a culture cultivating quality. The way the process of bottom-up loading of the goals and themes via dialogue sessions, Communities of Practice and learning innovators illustrates this process-oriented approach. Especially in the conversation with the vice-deans, 'the spirit to further develop' in an atmosphere of joint cooperation and coordination could be felt."⁴

- **Leadership and mastery:** there is strong involvement of all levels of governance, up to and including the Executive Board, in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of both formal programme accreditation and TOE processes. This relies heavily on a policy advice line embedded in constructive collaboration between central and faculty quality assurance

² ITK panel assessment 2018.

³ The 2018 ITK panel recommendations were taken into account in the planning and development of the quality agreements.

⁴ Report Audit Midterm Review of 7 March 2022 on the implementation of the Educational Vision and Strategy at Erasmus University (as formulated in *Strategy 24*).

staff (e.g. *Onderwijsatelier*). There is a broad support structure for educational innovation, at both the central (Community for Learning & Innovation, strategic programmes) and decentralised levels (Learning & Innovation Teams).

- **Informed dialogue:** engaging in dialogue is a widely supported idea, and there is a rich landscape of dialogue structures – both horizontal and vertical. Attention is being paid to the interplay of roles and responsibilities and specifically the importance of internal checks and balances. Central facilitation of and mutual collaboration between examination boards is handled in a professional manner. A participation coordinator facilitates collaboration between participation bodies at different levels and works on a project basis to further strengthen their positioning.

We also know that there are a number of untapped opportunities to set up the internal quality assurance system more effectively and efficiently by strengthening the connections between quality dialogues at different levels of the organisation and sharing examples of quality assurance best practice:

- **Consciously decentralised:** against the background of a decentralised organisation and a suboptimal information base and data curation, it is difficult to get insight into goals and outcomes of improvement and innovation policies in terms of their effect on educational quality at the programme level.⁵ There are limited formalised institutional frameworks for quality assurance. At the central level, only partial view of educational quality exists beyond the formal accreditation and TOE processes, and the focus on strategic alignment could be further embedded in the TOE system.
- **Leadership and mastery:** shared ownership of educational quality can be strengthened through a better understanding of the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the different organisational layers and the first, second and third-line actors within those layers. Bilateral dialogue on educational quality between the Executive Board and faculties could be strengthened. Throughout the organisation, we have observed that educational innovation efforts are not optimally linked to responsibility for quality assurance.
- **Informed dialogue:** continued development of the positioning of the participation bodies requires leadership from management in addition to coordination and support.⁶ Examination boards also need attention, as they grapple with the implications of various developments within and outside education for their role.⁷ Systematic engagement of alumni, the professional field and the wider environment in the PDCA, as well as attention to external benchmarking, could be strengthened. The information base required for proper dialogue could also be strengthened. Both quantitative educational data and qualitative reflection on programme objectives will need continual attention and commitment in the years ahead.

The ambition is to build on the strengths of our internal quality assurance system and, over the next few years, work towards the next level of maturity in this system (with the ultimate goal of optimal positioning in the autonomy-alignment quadrant below), through a focus on the following points:

⁵ Improvements are necessary in part because a revised educational vision has recently been adopted and EUR is currently facing choices around the allocation and spending of future funds to improve educational quality.

⁶ Partly in view of their co-creation role and involvement in the spending of the Quality Agreements (HEQA) funds, and the continuation thereof in the context of the 'Bestuursakkoorden' funds.

⁷ Such as developments in assessment, flexibilisation, digitalisation, the role of practical components, interdisciplinarity and generative AI.

Overarching: linking internal and external quality assurance

- Embed periodic reflection on educational quality into the culture and processes in such a way that achieving an ITK and/or programme accreditation becomes an accessible step and has a relatively small impact on day-to-day operations.

1. Strengthening a culture of learning and reflection, and facilitating synergy between autonomy and alignment

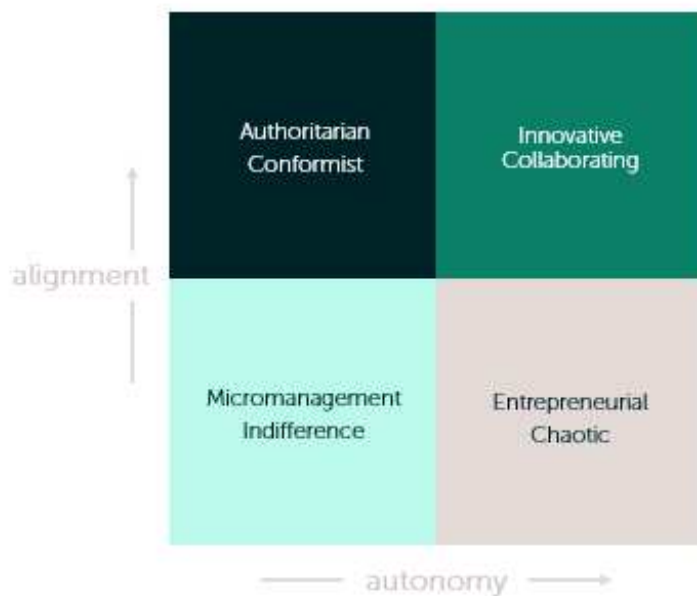
- Facilitate and strengthen cooperation between faculties and programmes to increase collective learning from initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education.

2. Professionalising and strengthening shared ownership

- Further develop and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and professionalise them to enact these roles accordingly.

3. Strengthening the information base for informed dialogue

- Make relevant information more easily and efficiently accessible to better facilitate the various quality dialogues.



3. Action lines

To realise the ambitions described, and achieve a successful ITK 3.0 in 2026, EUR will focus on the following action lines (see Ch. 5 Phases and timeline for the planning).

1. Strengthening a culture of learning and reflection, and facilitating synergy between autonomy and alignment.

By facilitating faculties through the development of manuals and guidelines, sharing of good practices and strengthening alignment at the level of supporting systems and processes, an increase in efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved. This will create space for initiative and entrepreneurship. At the same time, this process will result in more uniform information at all levels.

Actions:

- Supported by external experts, an inventory will be conducted of the available quality assurance policy documents and process descriptions at the institutional level, and the alignment of these documents with the educational vision and quality assurance vision. Together with the Onderwijsatelier, gaps and opportunities for revision/improvement will be identified (fit-gap analysis).
- In the Onderwijsatelier, faculties exchange experiences and good practices with regard to quality assurance, facilitated by Academic Affairs. In the coming years, concrete assignments for policy development will be derived from these exchanges, which will be assigned to working groups chaired by Academic Affairs, with involvement of faculty colleagues. Prioritisation will follow from the fit-gap analysis.
- Existing and newly developed policy documents will be collected and made available via a website/digital quality assurance portal (still to be developed), which will serve internally as institutional quality assurance handbook and will also form an important part of the documentation for the ITK panel.⁸
- In addition, Academic Affairs will collaborate with the Onderwijsatelier in facilitating the curation of the documentation set for the ITK programme trails.

2. Professionalising and strengthening shared ownership.

To ensure that the vision on quality assurance comes to life and finds fertile soil in the institution, training and collaboration around quality assurance will be strengthened in the coming years.

Actions:

- In cooperation with relevant stakeholders (Ch. 4), the vision on quality assurance will be further developed. This will include fleshing out the various roles, to help all stakeholders participate in the dialogue on educational quality from their own position and responsibility.⁹ Erasmian **competency profiles** will be developed for leadership (first-line responsibility) and mastery (second-line responsibility) in quality assurance.¹⁰

⁸ Good practice quality assurance portal KU Leuven: <https://www.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/onderwijskwaliteit>.

⁹ A relevant framework is the (risk management) model of The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), the **Three Lines** model.

¹⁰ A connection will be made with the Erasmian leadership profile (*Leading for impact, the Erasmian Way*), EUR HR Strategy.

- A *Meesterschap in Kwaliteitszorg* (Mastery in Quality Assurance) **professionalisation course** will be developed, aimed at professionalising staff with second-line responsibility, specifically decentralised quality assurance advisers.¹¹ It will be offered twice in the coming years (2024/2025 and 2025/2026). The course includes a two-day **excursion/working visit** to KU Leuven (good practice online quality assurance portal) and Ghent University (good practice quality management system).
- The course will also involve other stakeholders, such as vice-deans and learning innovators, at various times. Several **co-creation sessions** will be scheduled with the programme directors of programmes participating in the quality management system pilots. The professionalisation course will generate input that supports the further development of this system (Point 3).

Objectives of the *Meesterschap in Kwaliteitszorg* professionalisation course:

- strengthening knowledge in the organisation regarding EUR quality assurance;
 - promoting and deepening the exchange of knowledge between quality assurance advisers (and relevant stakeholders within the programmes);
 - strengthening quality assurance advisers in their role by enriching knowledge, training skills and working on personal development;
 - contributing to the development of a new quality management system (*Kwaliteitsmanagementsysteem*, KMS) for EUR;
 - contributing to the development of process descriptions and guidelines around EUR quality assurance (input for the quality management system);
 - supporting/supervising nine pilots running alongside the course (and involving the relevant programme directors and other stakeholders).
- **Sounding board sessions and round-table discussions** will be organised at various times to engage relevant stakeholders and gather input, regarding both the issues surrounding the quality assurance system itself and the more substantive educational ambitions and related organisational issues. The examination boards also have an important part to play here.
 - Another building block is **strengthening the positioning of the participation bodies**, in particular the programme committees. To this end, we are committed to building a more robust range of training courses for the participation bodies and their secretaries. We want to create stronger awareness among members of the participation bodies of the role they play in educational quality assurance. We aim to professionalise the secretaries in their role so that they can also better train and supervise the participation body members in their tasks and duties. Accumulated knowledge and skills will be safeguarded, and space will be provided for self-reflection on actions taken.

3. Strengthening the information base for informed dialogue

Increasing internal and external requests for information mean it is increasingly important to make educational information accessible on a constant basis, at all layers of the organisation.

Actions:

¹¹ A connection will be made with the *Leergang Onderwijskundig Leiderschap* (first-line) and the possible development of third-line responsibility.

- In cooperation with the faculties, a **quality management system** (*Kwaliteitsmanagementsysteem*, KMS) is being developed in an iterative process. At the minimum, the KMS aims to systematically bring together information around accreditations and interim programme evaluations and provide structure and visibility to stakeholder interaction.
- The KMS will ideally consist of two interlinked parts: a qualitative component and a quantitative component.
 - The **qualitative component** is the part in which programmes enter their objectives, structured according to the four questions of *constructive alignment*.¹² Some programme objectives are derived from the NVAO assessment framework, while additional programme objectives may be determined by the programme itself, and/or at the faculty or institutional level. This will also make *strategic alignment* more visible.
 - Another important aspect of this qualitative component is the opportunity for **stakeholder interaction**. The participation bodies, the examination board and the professional field can reflect on the programme objectives. The same applies to peer panels. All stakeholders can make recommendations to which the programme management must respond according to the *Apply or Explain-principle*.
 - The **quantitative component** is the part in which programme data are made accessible. Developments in educational data can be an interesting source for stakeholders to base their feedback on or relate it back to. Programme data are also relevant from a management perspective, whether on the level of the programme, faculty or institution.

Objectives of the quality management system:

- gives (continuous) visibility to the design and operation of internal PDCA;
- helps making objectives transparent and explicit;
- functions as a tool for self-reflection and dialogue;
- offers a view on alignment (strategic and constructive);
- provides space for stakeholder engagement and interaction;
- substantiates scope for development-oriented approaches;
- provides a reasoned prioritisation of investments;
- facilitates cross-sectional analysis for internal audit and horizontal learning;
- can replace traditional self-evaluation reports/action plans;
- is more dynamic and adaptive than more static documents.

- Ideally, the KMS will ultimately exist as an intuitive IT solution. But in its first iteration, the qualitative component will build on existing action plan formats that will be developed further to incorporate operationalised programme objectives as well as recommendations of other stakeholders. Simultaneously, a developer will work on an initial version of an IT application, which will be piloted together with faculty quality

¹² 1. *What do we want graduates to know and be able to do?* Intended Learning Outcomes
 2. *How do we enable students to meet these ILOs?* Teaching and learning environment
 3. *How do we know we have succeeded?* Assessment
 4. *How do graduates perform in practice?* Achieved Learning Outcomes

assurance advisers and programme directors in the context of the *Meesterschap in Kwaliteitszorg* course.

- The initial version of the quantitative component is being developed by the Data Competence Hub (DCH) in the form of a datasheet containing programme information and educational data. The DCH is translating that information from a great variety of sources, using different systems and definitions. This makes for a labour-intensive exercise resulting in little reliable output. EDIS works hard to better align the source information for various information requests, using institution-wide software systems with shared definitions. From 2027, a Curriculum Information System (CIS) will be in use, in which programmes will process programme information in a similar way. Academic Affairs is involved as a stakeholder in the purchase and setup of this CIS to achieve compliance and alignment with accreditation-related issues.

4. Programme structure

For the implementation of the programme plan, a temporary programme structure is being set up alongside EUR's existing organisational structure. It makes use of existing forums as much as possible.

- The Executive Board holds **the decision-making authority** and, together with the Board of Deans, is the **owner**.
- A **supervisory group** (*bestuurlijke begeleidingsgroep*) will monitor progress and steer any necessary adjustments in the process. This groups will not make decisions itself, but can advise on decision-making, specifically in situations where there are opposing interests or conflicts within the organisation. The supervisory group comprises the Rector Magnificus, the director of Academic Affairs, a dean and three vice-deans of Education. This group will meet once every two months after the regular vice-deans consultation meetings.
- A **lead group** (*kopgroep*) composed of various stakeholders, including representatives from the participation bodies and the chairs of examination boards (OVE), will be involved in initial vision development and act as a sounding board group (and, where relevant, in an ambassador role) throughout the process. They will provide critical input and advice but will not make decisions. Some sessions focus on the general programme level, and there will also be sessions planned, focusing specifically on the *Meesterschap in Kwaliteitszorg* course.
- The **core team** consists of four Education & Quality Assurance policy advisers from Academic Affairs. The core team will direct the entire programme for the Executive Board/Board of Deans under the guidance of the supervisory group. The programme comprises several sub-projects, to which different **working groups** are attached. Members of the core team will act as project leaders of the sub-projects. The core team will coordinate with the lead group, the supervisory group and the Executive Board/Board of Deans, and with the working groups and other stakeholders.
- An external **project leader/adviser** will act as general process supervisor, working in close cooperation with the core team and supervisory group, and will act specifically as project leader of the professionalisation course sub-project.

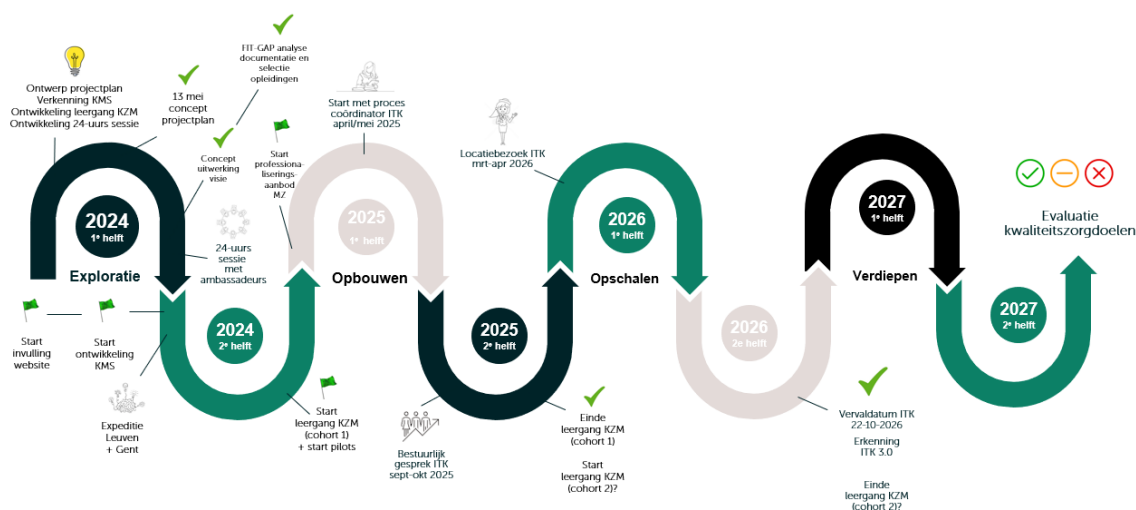


5. Phases and timeline

The timeline of the ITK process is shown below:



The timeline of the Strengthening EUR Educational Quality Assurance programme is divided into four phases, roughly spread over a four-year period.



In the first half of 2024, we will mainly be **exploring and launching** the programme, doing considerable preparatory work to get the various projects up and running. In this phase, we will draw up the programme plan and ensure that all stakeholders are properly engaged. We will do this not only by consulting the administrative forums, but also by gathering broad input from the organisation through sounding board sessions. We will design the professionalisation course for quality assurance advisers, and after the summer, we will run it for the first cohort of

participants. We will conduct a thorough exploration of the options in designing our proposed quality management system and will initiate the implementation of the system by running pilots. As part of the professionalisation course, input will be generated to support these pilots. Construction of the website/digital quality assurance portal will begin in 2024. All of this will contribute to our ITK preparation, but as specific steps towards the ITK in 2026 we will also perform a fit-gap analysis in 2024 on the documentation we will have to provide, and we will select the four participating programmes.

In 2025, we will continue to **build** the projects and gradually learn from the output and feedback from the projects. Cohort 1 of the professionalisation course for quality assurance advisers will wrap up, and we will get started on the second cohort. The KMS pilots will be up and running and will provide input for further development of the system. Development of the website/digital quality assurance portal can happen in this phase, and the documentation for the ITK will be completed so we have everything ready in time. In 2025, we will also start offering additional training opportunities to the participation bodies as part of their professionalisation.

2026 will be all about **scaling up and improving**, continuing to shape the rollout of projects and making adjustments where necessary. Also, the ITK site visit is scheduled for March–April of 2026, and we expect to obtain the ITK recognition in October–November. Cohort 2 of the professionalisation course for quality assurance advisors will be finishing up, and if we have enough suitable participants, we will launch a third cohort. The pilots will continue, and it is expected that the KMS can be further developed and scaled up.

In 2027, we will reach the phase of **deepening and dissemination**, and we will evaluate the extent to which the quality assurance goals have been achieved.

6. Budget

Available resources 2024 and beyond

- Of the resources at Academic Affairs' disposal, €200k per year (2024–2026)¹³ is earmarked for strengthening the quality culture, further developing innovation and quality assurance, and preparing for the ITK. We will spend these resources on hiring general process supervision, support for the implementation of the project plans (action lines 1–3) and project leadership for the professionalisation course sub-project (action line 2). Development of the website/digital quality assurance portal (action line 1) and execution of the professionalisation course will also be covered by these resources (action line 2).
- Hiring support for the preparation and organisation of the ITK (action line 1) will be partly funded from the 'going concern' budget for accreditations.
- The training activities aimed at strengthening the participation bodies will be covered by incidental OCW funds earmarked for this purpose, in accordance with the project plan adopted by the Executive Board dd. 8 December 2022.*
- A one-off €100k has been set aside from HEQA funds for the ABC Dashboard (cost of developer). These resources will be used to develop the first iteration of the quality management system (action line 3). Costs for further development and maintenance are yet to be determined.

Budget for 2024 and beyond

	Actielijn	2024	2025	2026	Dekking
Procesbegeleiding op programmaniveau Ondersteuning uitvoering projectplannen Projectleiding leergang	1, 2, 3	50.000	89.000	89.000	AZ Kwaliteitscultuur
Ondersteuning voorbereiding ITK	1	62.000	80.000	80.000	AZ Kwaliteitscultuur & AZ Accreditaties
Ontwikkeling digitaal kwaliteitszorgportaal	1	50.000	50.000	Ntb	AZ Kwaliteitscultuur
Uitvoering leergang	2	34.000	34.000	Ntb	AZ Kwaliteitscultuur
Versterking medezeggenschap*	2	*	*		OCW-middelen ¹⁴
Kwaliteitsmanagementsysteem	3	50.000	50.000	Ntb	HOKA ABC Dashboard

Actielijnen:

1: Versterken van de synergie tussen autonomie en alignment

2: Professionalisering en versterking van gedeeld eigenaarschap

3: Versterken van de informatiebasis van de geïnformeerde dialoog

¹³ This does not include the budget for the coordinator (0.5 FTE).

¹⁴ Earmarked funds 'strengthening participation bodies', see OCW-letter dd. 11 april 2022 (# 32358452).