EFFECTIVE COPMLIANCE? AN ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTARY QUALITY ASSURANCE
CERTIFICATE ADOPTION IN DUTCH HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Voluntary certification has become a new trend in the education sector; however, little is known about the motivations that guide higher education institutions to adopt these quality assurance certification schemes. In this research, I explore the motivations of higher education institutions for adopting the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization. Additionally, I analyze the effects of this quality assurance certification on Dutch higher education programs. The findings suggest that higher education programs are motivated to adopt certification by a desire for acknowledgment, a desire for improvement and a desire for marketing advantages. The distinctive quality feature for internationalization has an effect on student requirements, program coordination, program administration, and staff awareness.

Keywords: Certification; self-regulation; quality assurance

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Introduction

Private voluntary regulation in the form of private voluntary certification schemes has become increasingly popular among both public and private actors in different industries (Potoski & Prakash, 2005). Private voluntary certification schemes are believed to offer many advantages over more traditional forms of regulation (e.g. classical regulation) (Lytton, 2014). It should come as no surprise that private certification schemes have been both highly adopted and highly researched in recent years. For example, a lot of research has been conducted on the International Organization for Standardization's ISO14000 certification series for environmental management. These certifications have been used in corporations all across the world, such as Brazil (Gavronski, Ferrer & Paiva, 2007), China (Chan & Wong, 2004) and Japan (Welch, Mori, & Aoyagui-Usui, 2001) and in different industries such as hotel management (Chan & Wong, 2004), forest management (Overdevest & Rickenbach, 2005) and business management (Rondinelli & Morrow, 2002; Rondinelli & Vastag, 2000). Researchers have written on the topics of the motivations, advantages, disadvantages, effects and mechanisms of private voluntary certification. However, though voluntary private certification schemes have been extensively researched in corporate and business settings (Darnall, 2006; Potoski & Prakash, 2005; Welch, Mori & Aoyagui-Usui, 2002), less is known about the mechanisms of voluntary private certifications in public and semi-public institutions, despite the existence of private certification schemes in these sectors as well.

To give an example, in recent years, the use of so-called quality assurance certifications in the education industry have become increasingly popular in Europe and their use is becoming more and more debated among scholars (Stensaker & Harvey, 2006). In the Netherlands, we see that in recent years, several Dutch Higher Education programs have voluntarily adopted quality assurance certifications from the Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organization (from now on: NVAO). One of the most popular quality assurance certificates in the Netherlands is the so-called *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* from the NVAO. Just as environmental management continues to be important within business and hotel industries, among others, so has internationalization become increasingly visible on the agenda of governments, education institutions and agencies all over the world since the 1980's (De Wit, 2010). In 2010, the NVAO even set out to develop an assessment framework for internationalization to "limit the

interpretation of what […] internationalization means" (Aerden et al., 2013, p. 61). This concluded in the development of the voluntary *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* assessment framework and certification (Aerden et al., 2013; NVAO, 2011; De Wit, 2010). This framework was meant to serve as an NVAO-designed guideline for Dutch and Flemish higher education programs about what internationalization was and how it was supposed to be implemented within education programs. In 2010, after completing the pilot program, 17 Dutch programs obtained the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. As of 2017, a total of 39 Dutch higher education programs have obtained the NVAO feature. Recently, higher education programs and institutions have also been adopting the European Consortium for Accreditation's (ECA) *certificate for quality in program internationalization* certificate, which grew out of the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. The development of the certificate followed from higher education programs' and institutions' desire to have a qualitative methodology to assess their levels of internationalization. The members and partners of the ECA, which includes the NVAO, thus developed a new assessment framework to be used in the assessment of the internationalization standards of programs all over Europe. The *certificate for quality in program internationalization* certificate, just like the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*, is a voluntary quality feature. As of 2017, this feature had been adopted by 18 Dutch higher education programs. However, not enough is known about the mechanisms or motivations behind the adoption of either the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* or the *certificate for quality in internationalization* in Dutch (and Flemish) higher education programs.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, it is to explore the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization.* Second, it is to analyze the effect of the distinctive quality feature on higher education institutions' programs. I hope that this research will provide more insight into the use of private voluntary certifications in public and semi-public sectors. More research about the mechanisms and motivations behind the adoption of private voluntary certifications will enhance understanding of private (self-) regulation and its potential to improve the way organizations within the public sector function.

Research Questions

This research will consist of interviews with program coordinators of several Dutch higher education programs that have adopted the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization.* The questions that I will seek to obtain answers to are the following:

a. What are the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*?
b. What is the effect of the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* on higher education institutions' academic programs?

Chapter Outline

Chapter one will provide some background information on the concept of internationalization. This chapter is meant to simply give the reader a basic understanding of the concept and why internationalization is important in the context of higher education in the Netherlands. Chapter two will briefly discuss both classical and alternative regulation before going into a more in-depth review of the literature corresponding to private regulation and the use of private voluntary certifications as a form of self-regulation. I will discuss the mechanisms and advantages of private certification as well as the literature on motivations for voluntary certificate adoption. In Chapter three I will present the research questions as well as hypotheses of this research. Chapter four will discuss the methodology in regards to the research, the limitations of the research and how I intent to analyze the data. Chapter five will present the findings obtained through semi-structured interviews with nine program coordinators of different higher education programs in the Netherlands. Finally, I will conclude with a chapter discussing the findings.

Chapter 1: The Concept of Internationalization and its Assessment in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* by the NVAO is one of the most popular quality assurance certificates. As of 2017, a total of 39 Dutch higher education programs have voluntarily adopted this certificate. For the purpose of better understanding the motivation of Dutch higher education programs in adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*, this chapter will provide some background information as well as an examination of the concept of internationalization. Additionally, this chapter will explore some of the motivations behind why education programs and institutes seek to adopt internationalization standards of education in higher education.

1.1. History and evolution of internationalization.

The concept of internationalization has been difficult to define due to its reputation for being broad and multifaceted, complex, multidimensional and fragmented (NVAO, 2011; De Wit, 2010). In the beginning, when the concept of internationalization was first introduced on the agenda of governments and institutions, the concept referred merely to the cross border movement of students and scholars (De Wit, 2010). Since then, the concept has evolved to include several other definitions. Internationalization nowadays involves an attempt to attract international students and teaching staff, encourage national students to take part in exchange programs abroad, collaborate with international scholars on international researches, and take part in dialogues regarding international development. In short: Internationalization involves "the movement of students, scholars and ideas across national boundaries" (Hudzik, 2011, p. 7). Similarly, the association of international educators, the NAFSA, describes internationalization as a "conscious effort to integrate and infuse international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the ethos and outcomes of postsecondary education" (NAFSA, 2008).

The concept of internationalization has its origins in twelfth and thirteenth century Europe, when the most important European universities of the day became the meeting grounds for different collectives of international scholars (Wildavsky, 2010). Back then, scholars gathered together to share their ideas in an attempt to obtain universal knowledge (De Wit, 2008). This trend resurged starting from the 1980s and onwards as a result of European programs for cooperation and exchange in education and research (De Wit, 2010). At the time, the approach to the concept had a merely reactive strategic nature. Since then, internationalization

has evolved into a more pro-active strategic issue, in which its focus and content have both changed substantially and has become an indicator of quality in higher education (Aerden et al., 2013; De Wit, 2010). Internationalization takes into account not only the cross-border movement of students and scholars, but also the process called *internationalization at home* in which local campuses seek to become more international by adapting their curriculum to fit international standards and employing international teaching staff (De Wit, 2010). Currently, scholars acknowledge both of these components, namely *internationalization at home* and *internationalization abroad* as evolving in higher education internationalization (De Wit, 2010; Knight, 2008). Whereas *internationalization abroad* refers to mobility of all types (student mobility, faculty mobility, project mobility, provider mobility), *internationalization at home* involves a curriculum orientation. It focuses on teaching and learning processes, outcomes, as well as other activities involving research and cultural engagement. In reality, however, the two components are more intertwined than exclusive (De Wit, 2010).

Since the 1980s, internationalization of higher education has changed substantially and has also come to serve different purposes (De Wit, 2013; Hudzik, 2011). Nowadays, we are looking at an internationalization landscape that has been vastly affected by globalization. The globalization touch to internationalization can be seen in several different developments, for example: the growth of student, program and credit mobility (De Wit, 2010). Mobility in general remains the dominant aspect of internationalization in Europe (Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009). The developments that have taken place in higher education institutions all over the world as a result of globalization have also opened up the discussion about the outcomes of internationalization (Aerden et al., 2013). This discussion was stimulated in part by essays by De Wit and Brandenburg (2011) and the International Association of Universities (IAU) (2012) that argued that internationalization should become a broad and integrated aspect of education and not just a "fragmented list of activities executed by international offices and a small group of motivated internationalists among staff and students" (Aerden et al., 2013, p. 58). Thus, Brandenburg and De Wit advocate a more outcomes-focused approach to internationalization rather than the popular focus on incoming and outgoing student mobility (Aerden et al., 2013).

1.2. Motivations for internationalization.

While there are several reasons why education programs and education institutions may pursue internationalization of their education, these motivations can be categorized as following: 1) academic motivations, 2) socio-cultural motivations, 3) political motivations, and 4) economic motivations (De Wit, 2010). Academic motivations include the possibility of conducting internationally relevant research, improving teaching and learning of students and thus improving the educational quality, and maintaining a good profile and status. Socio-cultural motivations include the desire to create an intercultural competence in students and faculty, making students and faculty more aware of cultural differences in other parts of the world and giving them the tools to function within intercultural environments. Political motivations for internationalization include equipping students and faculty with tools to take part in discussions about foreign policy development, national and international security, national and international identity formation and world peace. Finally, the economic motivations include competitiveness, improving the market position and obtaining financial benefits.

Knight (2008) categorized the motivations of programs and institutions differently. He made a distinction between motivations that are emerging at the national level and those that are emerging at the institutional level. The motivations emerging at the institutional level include: international branding and profile, reaching international standards, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances and knowledge production. On the other hand, emerging motivations at the national level include marketization, competition and management. Internationalization, thus, "is not an end but a means to many ends" (Hudzik, 2001, p. 8). The purposes of internationalization are plenty. Internationalization is purposed to make institutions active participants in the changing local and global environment. Internationalization brings people, brains and ideas together with the purpose of discovery. Internationalization equips individuals to be able to function in this interconnected global environment. It makes graduates more world-conscious and allows them to provide more relevant service to their respective national societies. Internationalization can push higher education institutions to effectively make use of their research capacities to obtain other societally relevant purposes such as continued economic, social and cultural development of nations in a global environment (Hudzik, 2011).

1.3. Approaches to internationalization.

While internationalization is a desired achievement of higher education institutions all over the world, the approach to internationalization may vary per education program and institution (De Wit, 2005; 2007; 2010; Frolich, 2008). De Wit (2010) noted that there is a striking difference between the internationalization approaches that European universities take. Whereas some universities took a cooperative approach to internationalization, others take a more competitive approach. The finding that certain universities have more competitive approaches to internationalization shows a departure from the traditional academic values of cooperation and exchange (De Wit, 2010). De Wit (2002; 2010) categorized different institutional approaches to include: 1) the activity approach, 2) the rationale approach, 3) the competency approach, and 4) the process approach. The activity approach to internationalization looks at internationalization from a perspective of activities; what types of activities does internationalization include? The rationale approach looks at the rationales and motivations behind internationalization and sees internationalization as a means to achieve certain predefined outcomes. The competency approach regards internationalization as a means through which institutions can develop their students, faculty and staff to possess new knowledge and skills. Finally, the process approach sees internationalization as a process that integrates an international dimension to an institutions' functions. It is important, however, to note that these approaches are not mutually exclusive; they are intertwined and dynamic categories, meaning that they may change over time, differ per institution and/or country, and may inspire new and different approaches (De Wit, 2010). The differences in approaches between universities can be attributed to the fact that internationalization is developing in a different way in different countries. As De Wit (2010) put it: "Internationalization strategies are filtered and contextualized by the specific internal context of the university, and how they are embedded nationally" (p. 5). Frolich and Vega (2005) argue that many factors, such as history, culture, institutional profiles and initiatives, national policies, regulatory frameworks, and finance, are of influence on internationalization approaches and the subsequent process of internationalization of an institution. Therefore, internationalization approaches may differ not just per country, but also per institution, per program within the institution, and per degree level (De Wit, 2010).

1.4. Internationalization assessment.

Because of the differences in the way countries, institutions and programs approach internationalization, assessment of internationalization is difficult. As previously mentioned, Brandenburg and De Wit advocate an outcomes-focused approach to internationalization rather than the popular focus on incoming and outgoing student mobility (Aerden et al., 2013). The reason for this outcomes-focused approach is that rather than focusing on the process of internationalization itself, it focuses on the quality of students' academic performance, which, as Beerkens put it, is "what really matters" (Beerkens, 2015, p. 238). However, this focus on specific outcomes of internationalization also called for an effective assessment of the quality of internationalization in higher education institutes and study programs. This assessment would have to lead to the development and establishment of a certification scheme for internationalization, which would assess and represent the progress institutions make in their attempts to internationalize their programs (Aerden et al., 2013). Over the last couple of years, many attempts were made to design assessment methods for the quality of internationalization (De Wit, 2010). However, the tools and instruments developed by different associations have in common that, rather than being outcome-oriented, they were more focused on input and output, and the assessment of institutional-level internationalization rather than program-level internationalization (Aerden et al., 2013). A different assessment was needed to measure internationalization according to the outcomes-focused approach De Wit and Brandenburg had previously suggested.

1.5. Internationalization assessment in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, market-based instruments of policy regulation have become increasingly popular and have found their way to the Dutch higher education sector (Dill and Beerkens, 2012). This development can be seen in the growing trend of quality assurance accreditation and certification in higher education programs and institutions, such as the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* and the ECA *certificate for quality in program internationalization*. Proponents of market-based instruments believe that they are more efficient than more traditional forms of regulation (Beerkens, 2013). As of 2017, a total of 39 Dutch programs have been awarded the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* and a total of 26 higher education programs (18 of which are Dutch programs) have obtained the *certificate for quality in program internationalization*. I expect this number to go up in the next years.

The use of quality assurance certification for internationalization in Dutch higher education began in 2010 with the development of the *distinctive quality feature*. Back then, the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO), set out to develop an assessment framework for internationalization to "limit the interpretation of what […] internationalization means" (Aerden et al., 2013, p. 61). The NVAO started a pilot scheme among 21 Dutch and Flemish degree programs to assess their level of internationalization (De Wit, 2010). This pilot focused on answering four important questions in regards to a program's internationalization ambitions: 1) What is the program's vision for internationalization? 2) What is the impact of internationalization on the quality of the program? 3) How does the institution intend to execute its vision for internationalization in the program? And 4) How does this vision affect teaching and learning within the program? (Aerden et al., 2013). The pilot led to the development of the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* certificate. The standards in this assessment framework can be used by panels of experts on the topic of internationalization to standardize internationalization and to assess the quality of internationalization in programs (Aerden et al., 2013). The distinctive quality feature, however, is not to be confused with regular accreditation, which also takes internationalization into account. Rather, the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* is a separate and voluntary certificate for programs with high ambitions regarding internationalization. After a positive assessment of a program's internationalization level, the NVAO will award the distinctive quality feature. This feature allows programs and institutes to profile themselves both nationally and internationally as highly internationalized (Aerden et al., 2013). As previously mentioned, many of the Dutch programs who have previously obtained the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* have adopted or are in the process of adopting the ECA *certificate for quality in program internationalization*. This certificate is similar to the distinctive quality feature in that they both attempt to provide higher education programs with a methodology to assess and develop their internationalization standards (ECA, 2015). Internationalization is important to institutions in the Netherlands and Flanders as they see the internationalization of higher education as an additional contribution to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the region (NVAO, 2011). As the distinctive quality feature for internationalization is completely voluntary and higher education programs and institutions are not obligated to adopt the certificate, the NVAO argues that it is important that institutions are aware of the broadness and complexity of internationalization as a

concept and that they take this into account when evaluating the internationalization objectives that they want to pursue and whether these objectives lead to the outcome that they desire.

For the purpose of this research, we will focus on the programs and institutions that have adopted the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. We will examine the motivations that led to the adoption of the feature as well as the outcomes of the feature on the education.

Chapter 2: The evolution and use of private certification schemes

In the previous chapter I elaborated on the concept of internationalization and looked at the motivations behind it as well as the different approaches programs and institutions can take towards it. I also introduced the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*, which is a voluntary certification that provides programs and institutions with an assessment framework for their internationalization standards. In this chapter I will examine the evolution of private and voluntary certification schemes out of more classical and traditional forms of regulation. I will also elaborate on the use of these private certification schemes as well as the advantages attached to them. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a literature review on the motivations of organizations behind their adoption of private certification schemes.

2.1. Private certification as an alternative to classical regulation.

Classical regulation, also known as 'command-and-control' regulation, refers to a regulation approach in which demands, prohibitions and conditions for particular activities are set in place by the government and in which legal infringement can lead to legal consequences, and compliance can lead to compensation (Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2012; Lodge & Wegrich, 2012). 'Command-and-control' regulation involves "the setting of standards within a rule, it often entails some kind of licensing process to screen entry to an activity, and may set out to control not merely the quality of a service or the manner of production but also the allocation of resources, products, or commodities and the prices charged to consumers or the profits made by enterprises" (Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2012, p.107). The problem with classical regulation is that, while the law can be used as a means of exerting power and imposing compliance to standards as well as prohibiting and punishing non-compliance, it also raises many issues. One of these issues, the issue of 'capture', which refers to the fact that regulators might become too close to the regulated subject, leading the regulator to become more invested with the interests of the regulated organization than those of the public at large (Wilson, 1984). Another issue with classical regulation is the emergence of 'legalism', which refers to 'command-and-control' regulation's tendency to be complex and inflexible, leading to over-regulation and the strangling of competition (Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2012). Another issue with the classical 'command-and-control' regulation is the challenge of setting appropriate standards and choosing the

appropriate *type* of standard when it comes to regulation. The regulator is more often than not forced to produce a generalized standard to which some organizations have a lot of difficulty complying to and others none whatsoever, which leads to problems with over- or under-inclusion of organizations (Sunstein, 1990). Lastly, the 'command-and-control' approach faces a challenge with enforcement. Classical 'command-and-control' regulation could be effective if there are enough resources available to ensure subject compliance to established rules. However, these resources are often not available, and compliance is therefore not monitored. Enforcement is expensive and its effects are uncertain (Dietz, Ostrom & Stern, 2003). In fact, regulation may actually encourage several forms of illegal activity and behavior (Baldwin, 2012).

Because of the limitations of classical 'command-and-control' approaches to regulation alternative forms of regulation have become more popular (Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2012). One of these alternatives is 'self-regulation', which involves giving rule-making power to the regulated industry, enterprise or organization. According to Ogus (1995), self-regulation is justified if any market-based regulation approach has failed, if traditional forms of regulation are expensive or ineffective and if self-regulation would be more effective and cheaper. Self-regulating entities have the advantage of not having to depend on third-party independent auditors to monitor performance as they can rely on the knowledge and expertise of their own members. Second, because of the close and trusted relationships between regulators and subjects, acquiring information, monitoring performance and enforcing or encouraging compliance is less costly than classical regulation (Ogus, 1995). Finally, because self-regulators are much better aware of what regulated enterprises, organizations, industries or individuals may deem as reasonable obligations, they are better able to design rules and regulations that will ultimately be followed by their subjects (Baldwin Cave and Lodge, 2012).

The use of market-based mechanisms is an interesting alternative to regulate individual and organizational behavior. Market-based systems of tradable environmental allowances (TEAs) are especially popular in the industries focused on environmental protection and have even made their way into the Kyoto protocol on climate change (Dietz, Ostrom & Stern, 2003). Market-based mechanisms are flexible and efficient in encouraging innovation within organizations (Lodge & Wegrich, 2012). Same as with self-regulation, market-based mechanisms are less costly and prescriptive than classical 'command-and-control' regulation. There are many ways in which market-based mechanisms can be used to regulate behavior, such

as economic or market incentives, the use of consumer information or the use of certifications. Whereas market incentives bring forward transaction costs and the issue of distrust (Van Waarden, 2012) and consumer information is unreliable and inconsistent (Fung et al., 2007), the use of certifications seem to present the least amount of issues. Certifications also have the advantage of having a generally positive response from the public. Consumers have been demonstrated to show a preference for certified products and services, even when these certified products and services are slightly more costly than their non-certified counterparts (Abbott and Snidal, 2009).

2.2. Private voluntary certification schemes.

In a certification system, certifications are used as a policy mechanism intended to verify and encourage compliance of regulated organizations or industries to certain standards. Generally speaking, certification schemes are considered "a complex of institutional policies and practices" (Overdevest & Rickenbach, 2006, p. 94). Certification programs can also be conceptualized as 'clubs' and can be used to encourage certain standards of conduct with the aim of obtaining certain public benefits (Potoski & Prakash, 2005).

There are many other definitions, leading to many differences between how researchers define the use, functionality and outcomes of certification systems. These differences have contributed to the fact that the mechanisms of certifications are still not understood correctly (King, Lenox & Terlaak, 2005). Certifications are believed to function as either a market-based mechanism (Gullison, 2003; Karna, Hansen & Juslin, 2003), a learning mechanism (Yamasaki, Kneeshaw, Munson & Dorian, 2002) or a signaling mechanism (Rametsteiner, 2002). Proponents of the market-based mechanism argue that regulated organizations join certification schemes to gain market advantages such as increased demand from consumers and product differentiation. These market advantages, in turn, encourage certification holders to improve the quality of their goods in an attempt to gain even more market advantages. Proponents of the signaling mechanism theory argue that certifications 'signal' to third parties (consumers, partners, and government) that an organization is complying with a set of previously established standards. Proponents of the theory of certification as a learning mechanism see certifications as a mechanism of information exchange in which relevant information regarding the industry of the certified good is transferred from regulators to regulated organizations.

Overdevest & Rickenbach (2006) argue that private certifications function as a signaling mechanism. Private certifications are a means of (quality) assurance and risk regulation. They provide consumers with assurance that the products and services they are consuming comply with previously determined criteria of quality specified by either the government or experts. Private certifications also serve as a way to provide input to regulated companies and organizations about their audience, and help government and oversight organizations assess and monitor levels of compliance to certain standards. Private certifications are beneficial for both organizations and consumers. One of the effects of voluntary certification programs is that participating organizations receive benefits that non-participants do not (Potoski and Prakash, 2005). This serves as an incentive for participants to join these voluntary certification schemes. Once they join and obtain the certification, participants can publicize their membership to the voluntary certification scheme and use this, for example, as a marketing tool.

2.2.1. Factors influencing the success of private certification.

There are several examples of private certifications that are legitimate, accountable, and transparent and that compare favorably with classical government regulation. These certifications share with each other a couple of factors that have been shown to be of influence to their success. Firstly, private certifications have been shown to be successful when they are *reliable*. While private certifications are believed to be more reliable and more consistent than other forms of regulation, their success depends entirely on whether consumers, subjects and other stakeholders can trust that organizations comply at all times with previously established standards (Fung et al., 2007). Secondly, the success of a certification will also depend on whether consumers are interested in having the certification or not. The bigger the *public demand*, the more likely manufacturers and service providers will be to seek testing and inspection of their goods by either independent auditors or the government. However, if the public doesn't express any interest or is otherwise unfamiliar with or unaffected by a cause, product or service, they are unlikely to care about whether an organization or industry has any certification or not (Lodge & Wegrich, 202). Another factor influencing the success of private certifications is the amount of *competition* existing between certifiers. The competition between different certifiers encourages an increase of reliability, accountability, information management, quality control and expertise (Lytton, 2014). Additionally, the success of private certification has

also been shown to be dependent on the level of *interdependence between participants*, meaning that participants taking part in the certification system monitor each other to ensure that everyone is meeting required standards (Cashore, Auld & Newsom, 2004). Fifthly, *market concentration* is also important as it is much easier to coordinate the development and implementation of standards when there is a concentration of market power under a small group of certifiers. These certifiers can get together and share information, deliberate and come to agreements on standards for the industry (Havinga, 2006). Finally, certifications are shown to be successful when there are consumers who keep *oversight* and provide valuable feedback. Certifiers will be keen on avoiding negative feedback from the consumers and will therefore avoid mistakes and misconduct (Lytton, 2014).

2.2.2. Advantages of private certifications.

Private certification offers significant operational, managerial, and competitive benefits for those organizations that adopt it (Rondinelli & Vastag, 2000). The implementation of ISO14001 standards at an aluminum plant, for example, resulted in improvements in *employee awareness*, *operational efficiency*, *managerial awareness*, and *operational effectiveness*. In regards to *efficiency*, Lytton (2014) also agrees that private certifications are more efficient than government regulation. This is because certifiers are eager to keep their fees low and their standards high. They rely on informal sanctions in comparison to the governments' more formal and juridical sanctions. Because of the cooperative relationship between private regulators and regulated organizations, regulators are more able than government to encourage regulated organizations to comply with certification standards.

In a similar study to Rondinelli and Vastag, Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) analyzed the relationship between firm's motivations and the benefits associated with the implementation of the ISO14001 in 63 different firms in Brazil. They were able to identify four different dimensions of benefits for the implementation of the ISO14001: 1. *Productivity Benefits*, which relates to firms' belief that complying with the standards of the ISO14001 would improve their productivity levels, 2. *Societal Benefits*, which relate to the relationships firms have with external stakeholders (government and society), 3. *Financial Benefits*, which relate to an increase in investments and/or sponsorships and increased income through increased productivity, and finally, 4. *Market Benefits*, which relate to the relationship between firms and customers, competitors and suppliers.

Another advantage of private certification is the fact that private certifications provide valuable information about a product or service to the consumer. This in turn encourages producers and service providers to continue improving their goods in an attempt to improve their rating or ranking. Certifiers typically have greater technical understanding of the goods they certify than the government does. This allows them to more accurately develop standards of compliance and systems of inspection that accurately judge the goods they certify. Because private certifiers don't face the same local, state or national jurisdictional boundaries that government does, they are able to monitor and inspect certification holders more easily (Baldwin, Cave & Lodge, 2012).

Lastly, private certification is considered to be more *proactive* than government regulation, which is considered to be more reactive. Private certifiers actively seek out issues and seek to correct them before they can affect certification holders or consumers. Government officials, in contrast, are more likely to wait until an issue presents itself or until an issue gets out of hand before intervening in the situation, which sometimes can be just a bit too late. Private certification is a lot more *responsive* to issues, both from within consumer communities and from within their regulated industries. Private certifiers are more likely to routinely review and revise their standards to better fit the purpose of their certifications. They are also more easily approachable by consumers and are more in tune with consumer concerns and consumer feedback. They actively seek out consumer feedback through the use of several means of communication and can respond quickly to the feedback they receive by changing their policy if necessary. Governments are able to respond less quickly because of procedural hurdles and because governments are typically less easily approached by consumers. In the case of government regulation, regulated organizations are more likely to look at government as some sort of 'police' that is strictly keeping an eye on their behavior. With private certification, the relationship between subject and regulator is more based on cooperation (Lytton, 2014; Ogus, 1995).

2.3. Motivations for pursuing certification.

While the advantages and disadvantages of certifications have been widely researched, far less is known about the motivations behind organizations' pursuit of voluntary certifications in non-private sectors. As previously mentioned, besides analyzing Brazilian firms' perceived benefits of ISO14001 implementation, Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) also analyzed the motivations

guiding firms' decision to certify to ISO14001. They identified four dimensions of motivation. The first one, *Reactive Motivations*, refers to a firm's desire to adopt certification as a result of an external situation. This includes, but is not limited to, pressure from society and government. Secondly, there is the category of *Internal Motivations*, which are directly related to a firm's culture and traditions. Inconveniences experienced in the day-to-day functioning of the firm may motivate the firm to pursue certification if through certification firms can solve some of these inconveniences. Besides this, firms may seek to adopt certification in an attempt to improve performance and comply with standards. Thirdly, the so-called *Pro-Active Motivations*, which is when a firm seeks to obtain certification to avoid encountering criticism or other problems with external stakeholders such as the government. Lastly, firms are also influenced by *Legal Motivations*, which refer to a firm's desire to comply with present or future regulations. These motivations are not mutually exclusive, as there may be two or more types of motivation at play, albeit with different levels of intensity. Their causal analysis also showed that the four different types of motivation previously mentioned may be divided in two levels: a lower level, consisting of internal and legal motivations, and a top level, consisting of pro-active and reactive motivations. The above mentioned set of motivations are also loosely related to motivation categories described by other researchers, such as Chan and Wong (2004).

Chan and Wong (2004) conducted their research among several hotels in Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen and Guangzhou to discover the real motive of these hotels in gaining the ISO14001 accreditation for environmental management. Their suggestion was that the implementation of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) such as the ISO14001 would bring several benefits to the hotels. These benefits are related to *cost reduction* and *image building*. As Chan and Wong (2004, p.482) put it: "Some [hotels] may adopt the standard to improve their environmental performance, but others may want to utilize it to gain a marketing advantage". In any case, external pressures from regulators, society and markets are particularly effective in pushing organizations to pursue legitimization from certifiers such as the ISO (Chan & Wong, 2004; Darnall, 2006). When it comes to motivations, Chan and Wong (2004) found that the two main motives for hotels' pursuit of the ISO14001 environmental management certification were: 1. *Corporate Governance*, and 2. *Legislation*. Corporate governance plays the most important role when it comes to affecting hotels' pursuit of ISO140001 certification. This shows the importance of the top-down approach in getting hotels to obtain certification.

Secondly, national legislation was another important motivator for the pursuit of ISO14001 certification (Chan and Wong, 2004). Governments in different countries have actively encouraged and in some cases even provided subsidies to aid hotels and other companies in obtaining ISO14001 certification. Again, this is in accordance with Darnall's findings that it was firms, and not the facilities, that either encouraged or demanded certification (2006).

Research conducted among Japanese firms found that one of the most important reasons why firms adopt voluntary certifications is that "the benefits of voluntarism outweigh the costs" (Welch, Mori and Aoyagui-Usui, 2002, p. 43). As economic and political theory explain, there are three factors that affect the motivation of firms in adopting voluntary certification schemes. The first one, *regulation advantages*, refers to the theory that voluntary certification schemes provide firms with the possibility to influence regulation. Since the public is becoming more aware and educated about the advantages and disadvantages of certain organizational behavior, markets are increasingly able to make demands on organizations in regards to these subjects (e.g. climate change). However, voluntary submission to certification schemes make pressure and consumer groups less effective in terms of lobbying (Welch, Mori, Aoyagi-Usui, 2002). So, in other words, regulatory theorists argue that voluntary adoption of certification schemes will reduce external, consumer, citizen and interest group pressure on an organization.

The second category of motivations, relating to *economic reasons*, refers to the reduction of costs, the appeal to potential investors and increased demand for products and/or services from the market. By pursuing certification, organizations may also signal to consumers and the public that they are committed to maintaining certain values or levels of quality, which may increase consumers' interest in the organization. This, in turn, may also attract favor from investors. All in all, an organization is better able to compete on the market as a result of certification. Consumers (students), stockholders, investors or the government may (financially) reward universities for their commitment to internationalization. A university may also use certification as a way to market their programs and in turn attract more students. Since more students equal more money, the main motivation behind certification might be financial. Organizations are also mindful of their *relationships with regulators* and/or fellow certified organizations (Darnall, 2006). By maintaining a good relationship with regulators and fellow certified organizations, organizations can ensure that they will be able to continue their endeavors for the long term. By pursuing certification, organizations might be able to more

easily form partnerships with other organizations possessing similar certifications and values. These partnerships, in turn, increase the legitimacy of the organizations and increase trust with regulators and government, which in turn also leads to other advantages such as increased interest, marketing, political power (the chance to participate in decision-making and influence the education policy agenda) or even funding. Pursuing a certification sends the signal that an organization is committed to a certain policy and is committed to taking the steps necessary to ensure optimal performance on the policy subject.

Another reason for organizations' submission to voluntary certification schemes has to do with their desire to showcase *social responsibility*. While companies are primarily interested in seeking profit, most also recognize the importance of being socially legitimate and desirable (Darnall, 2006). Management research has shown that firms and organizations sometimes exhibit genuine concern in the public and are motivated to apply standards that are publicly responsible. If firms and organizations genuinely believe that adopting certain standards and submitting themselves to voluntary certification schemes will in one way or another benefit the public, they will do so. On one hand, because of kindness, and on the other hand, because failure to do so may result in reputational damage.

Welch, Mori and Aoyagi-Usui (2002) add two more reasons to the list of reasons that political and economic theorists describe: the effect of *organizational factors* and *representation* on a firm or organizations' desire to submit to voluntary certification schemes. According to them, a firm or organizations' size is the biggest factor influencing submission to voluntary certification schemes. Larger organizations, therefore, are more likely to submit to voluntary certification schemes because they possess the resources and capacity necessary to complete certification requirements.

Lastly, *representation* of (environmental) concerns at the top highest level of a firm or organization is likely to influence an organizations' submission to voluntary certification schemes. This conclusion is in accordance with Darnall (2006) who argued that the decision to pursue certification was not a decision made by facilities alone but that firms played a significant role in motivating their operational facilities to pursue ISO14001 certification. Darnall (2006) argues that when analyzing the motivations for the adoption of the ISO14001 certification one must also consider the influence of parent companies or organizations. Darnall (2006) also

agrees that there are market pressures at play when it comes to organizations' decision to mandate and/or encourage certification for its operational units.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the literature on private voluntary certification schemes and the reasons that motivate organizations to adopt them. In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework for the research as well as the research questions and hypotheses.

As was previously mentioned, a total of 39 Dutch higher education programs have obtained the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. While these are respectable numbers, they are only a small fraction of higher education programs in the Netherlands. In fact, the majority of Dutch higher education programs have not adopted the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. What makes the distinctive quality feature appealing to some programs but not others? Concretely, I want to obtain answers to the following questions:

1. What are the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*?

2. What is the effect of the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* on higher education institutions' academic programs?

3.1. Motivations

Based on the literature review found in previous chapters, I have come up with several different possible categories of motivations for why higher education programs adopt NVAO certification.

3.1.1. Acknowledgment.

Public pressure as a motivation for adopting certification was described by Darnall (2006), Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) and Welch, Mori and Aoyagi-Usui (2002). Public pressure refers to what Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva refer to as *reactive* and *pro-active* motivations. In the case of the first, institutions adopt certification following external pressure from third parties. In the case of the second, institutions adopt certification to avoid criticism from consumers, government and interest-groups and gain positive interest from stakeholders. I believe that at the core of this is not just a desire to avoid public pressure, but a desire to get public interest, acknowledgment and validation. Looking at this from the perspective of the research, (international) students might exert pressure on their university to adopt certain

internationalization standards. Programs who continually lose (international) students to other universities might feel pressured to adopt certification in an attempt to improve their standing with students. Otherwise, programs may feel like adopting certification would give them public acknowledgment and/or validation, and would improve their reputation. I hypothesize, therefore, that:

H1: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to avoid public pressure and criticism.

H2: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to gain acknowledgment.

3.1.2. Marketing Advantages.

Marketing advantages refer not only to an institution's ability to appeal itself to potential stakeholders, but also to their ability to turn that appeal into increased demand for their product. This can be seen, for example, in higher enrollment numbers for education institutions that have obtained certification. Marketing advantages, however, not only refer to the before mentioned, but also to a whole slew of developments leading to a better market position for an institution. Certifications provide valuable information about organizations' activities and standards (Potoski and Prakash, 2005), which in turn allows institutions to reduce costs related to compliance and information transaction. Certifications also enable institutions to strengthen their relationships with regulators and partnerships with fellow certified organizations, which serves as a means to ensure that institutions will continue to enjoy support for their endeavors for a long time (Darnall, 2006). These partnerships increase the legitimacy of institutions, which in turn allows for an even bigger appeal to (international) stakeholders (students, staff, investors). I hypothesize, therefore, that:

H3: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to attract more students.

H4: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to strengthen relationships with (potential) partners.

3.1.3. Improvement.

While previously described categories of motivations refer to *external* influencers of an institutions' motivations, this category refers to *internal* influencers of an institutions' motivation. As Rondinelli and Vastag (2000) have argued, the adoption of certifications offer significant operational, managerial and competitive benefits to organizations. Adoption of ISO14001 standards in organizations have resulted in significant improvements in employee awareness, operational efficiency, managerial awareness and operational effectiveness, as was previously described. Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) have similarly argued that the adoption of ISO14001 standards leads to increased productivity levels in organizations. In adopting NVAO certification, institutions might be looking to improve the quality of their education and seek to comply to international standards because the advantages related to highly internationalized school environments versus not-internationalized environments are clear. The desire to adopt NVAO certification might be motivated by a commitment to providing high quality education for all students, international or not. Universities might be less concerned with what they can get out of certification and more concerned with improving the learning experience for their students. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to improve the quality of their education for students.

H6: Programs adopt the NVAO certificate to improve staff awareness on internationalization.

3.1.4. Top-down Pressure.

Welch, Mori and Aoyagi-Usui (2002) and Darnall (2006) argued that the decision to pursue certification is usually made at the top-level layers of an organization and demanded of or encouraged to the bottom-level operational units in an organization. Darnall (2006) argued that in order to gain an in-depth understanding of organizations' motivations to pursue certification, the influence of the organizational top must also be considered. The decision to pursue certification might be made at the institution- rather than the program level and programs may not have much say in whether they would like to pursue certification or not. I hypothesize, therefore, that:

H7: Programs adopt a certificate as a response to the pressure from the universities' central administration.

3.2. Effects

Besides mapping out the motivations behind Dutch higher education program's adoption of the NVAO feature, I am also interested in exploring the impact that the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* has had on the higher education programs that were a part of the research. I will view this impact from the perspective of the previously described categories, namely *reputation*, *marketing advantages*, *self-improvement* and *top-down pressure*. Additionally, I will also look at the overall level of satisfaction that programs experience with the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. When it comes to satisfaction, I believe that satisfaction is tied to motivation and expectation, in the sense that programs that are intrinsically motivated are more focused on the process rather than the results, and will therefore be more likely to be satisfied than programs who are focused on results and have higher expectations. This leads me to hypothesize that:

H8: Programs who adopt the NVAO certification for intrinsic reasons (self-improvement) are more satisfied than those who adopt certification for extrinsic reasons (top-down pressure, market advantages, reputation).

Finally, I also believe that, since there are costs attached to the adoption of the NVAO certification, programs who make the decision to adopt certification themselves are more satisfied with the certification. This is also because before making the decision to adopt certification programs take everything into consideration and are aware of what they are getting themselves into once they start the adoption process. On the contrary, programs who adopt certification because of pressure or encouragement from their superiors are likely to be less satisfied since they will be putting time and effort into something that they didn't choose themselves. This leads to the hypothesis:

H9: Programs who make the decision to adopt certification at the program-level are more satisfied than programs who adopt certification following a decision made at a higher level.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In the previous chapters, I provided a literature review discussing the concept of internationalization as well as a more in-depth look at the use of private certifications in different industries. In this chapter, I will present the methodological approach used to explore the motivations of higher education programs for adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* as well as the impact that the feature has had on the programs that were part of this research. I will first provide a short paragraph explaining the purpose of the research, followed by paragraphs detailing the approach, sample, data collection and data analysis.

4.1. Purpose of research

As was previously mentioned, little is known about the use of private certifications in public and semi-public sectors. The purpose of this research was to explore the motivations behind the adoption of voluntary certifications in public and/or semi-public institutions using the example of the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* among Dutch higher education programs. Through this qualitative research, I will attempt to identify higher education programs' motivations behind the adoption of the NVAO certification and the effects of the certification on their programs. The research questions of this research are as follows:

a. What are the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*?

b. What is the effect of the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* on higher education institutions' academic programs?

4.2. Participant selection|

There are a total of 39 Dutch higher education programs who have obtained the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* (Appendix A). For this research, a total of 20 Dutch programs were approached (Appendix B). These 20 programs were approached in an attempt to create a sample selection that would contain equal amounts of programs belonging to universities (WO) and universities of applied science (HBO). This, to allow better understanding of the motivations of both types of higher education programs. I also wanted a selection containing equal amounts of programs in the *Randstad* (metropolis area consisting of the four largest Dutch cities and their surroundings) and the more suburban and rural parts of the Netherlands. Finally, I

wanted the selection to contain both large programs (with student populations over 250) and small programs (with student populations of less than 250). However, for this research, I was dependent on the availability and willingness of participants. The final selection consisted of 3 program coordinators belonging to universities and 6 program coordinators belonging to universities of applied science. All programs selected in this research had obtained either a "good" or "excellent" internationalization assessment by the NVAO. Below, the list of programs that participated in the research.

Table 1. List of participants.

Program	WO/HBO	NVAO Assessment	Description
Engineering & Policy Analysis	WO	"good"	The Engineering and Policy Analysis program obtained the NVAO high quality distinctive feature for internationalization in 2010 as part of the first group of programs that obtained this certification. The program has so far been the only program from its respective university to adopt the NVAO certification. The decision to pursue this certification was made at the program level and was primarily encouraged by the program coordinator who continues to be one of the program coordinators at the University. At the time of adoption, the program consisted of a total of 20 students.

International Business Administration	WO	"excellent"	The International Business Administration program obtained the NVAO high quality distinctive feature in 2010. The International Business Administration program was the first program from its respective university to obtain the high quality certification. Since then, 3 other programs from the respective university have obtained the certification. The decision to certify was made at a conference for internationalization organized by the NVAO. The program coordinator and the rest of the program team were responsible for initiating the certification process. The student population for the International Business Administration Program consists for 65% of international students and is one of the largest in our sample.
Music	HBO	"good"	The Music program obtained the high quality feature for internationalization in 2011 as the first program from its respective university to obtain the certification. A year later, two other programs followed. The decision to adopt the NVAO feature was made at the university level, however, the program level was the initiator.
Development Studies	WO	"good"	The MA program Development Studies obtained the high quality feature for

			internationalization in 2010. The Development Studies program is highly internationalized and the program coordinator along with the rest of the program team decided that they wanted to participate in the NVAO pilot as one of the first programs in the Netherlands to seek to obtain the high quality feature.
Occupational Therapy	HBO	"good"	The European MSc. in Occupational Theory obtained their high quality feature for internationalization in 2010 after participating in the NVAO pilot. The decision to certify was made jointly between the Occupational Theory program staff and the Board of the respective university. According to our interviewee, the Occupational Theory program is a very small program who, because of its size, is able to enjoy a close relationship with the higher level Board.
European Studies	HBO	"excellent"	The European Studies program obtained the NVAO high quality feature for internationalization in 2010. The European Studies program is one of the largest programs participating in our research with approximately 2000 students. The decision to certify was made by the then program manager. The decision was made quickly; no discussions were had about the decision

			to certify. The European Studies program obtained the certification after participating in the NVAO pilot.
International Business Administration	HBO	"good"	The International Business Administration program obtained their high quality feature for internationalization in 2012, becoming the second program of its respective university to obtain it. The certification process was initiated after the decision was made by the program coordinator and program director at the time. The student population consists of about 40 to 50 different nationalities. International students make up 50% of the total student population for the program.
Tourism Destination Management	HBO	"good"	The Tourism Destination Management program has had the NVAO high quality feature for internationalization since 2012. The program coordinator was highly involved with the initiation and application for the internationalization certificate.
Business Administration in Hotel Management	HBO	"good"	The Business Administration in Hotel Management program has had the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization since 2012. The program is the first program from its respective university to obtain the internationalization certificate. The program has a student population of

			approximately 2000 students of which about 50% are from abroad.

4.3. Research design & method of data collection

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research. With this research, I wanted to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' motivations for and experience adopting the distinctive quality feature. A quantitative approach would not have allowed me to gain much depth. Through deduction, which involves analyzing the collected data to arrive at different categories of answers, I was able to come up with the most important motivations for adopting the distinctive quality feature.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Semi-structured interviews are less rigid than standardized interviews and therefore allow for more elaboration and flexibility from the participants. The interview consisted of eight pre-determined questions that were asked to all the participants. A list of these questions can be found in the Appendix (Appendix C). To increase the *dependability* of the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer asked multiple questions per variable, to ensure that participants were answering truthfully and not just giving socially desirable answers. When it comes to exploring the motivations of higher education programs for adopting the NVAO feature, the following questions were asked: 1) Why did you decide to pursue the NVAO feature?, 2) Why wasn't the regular accreditation enough?, and 3) What were you hoping to obtain from this certificate? Secondly, to analyze the effects of the feature on higher education programs, participants were asked questions regarding several subtopics: 1) What do you see as the main advantages of having the certification? (*advantages/benefits*), 2) What are the disadvantages of the certification? (*disadvantages/costs*), 3) What impact did the certification have on your program? (*impact*), and 4) How satisfied are you with the certification (on a scale of 1 to 5)? (*satisfaction*).

4.4. Procedure

Program directors and coordinators were contacted via e-mail (e-mail addresses were obtained online or were provided by student help desks of the respective universities). A total of 20 program directors and coordinators were contacted with a request for an interview. In the e-mail,

I explained the aim of the interview and offered to conduct the interview either in person, via telephone or via Skype depending on what the participant would feel more comfortable with. By ensuring the participant's comfort, I hoped to obtain honest answers to our questions. The first round of e-mails were sent in early November 2016. Three rounds of follow-up e-mails followed with intervals of two weeks. If I got no response after the last round of follow-up e-mails, I contacted the participants via telephone.

Five of the interviews were conducted in person, at a location specified by the participant. Two of the interviews were conducted via telephone, and two were conducted via Skype. The interviews took an average of 30 minutes to complete. Data was collected over a 4 month period, starting late November 2016. The last interview took place mid-March 2017. The questions, among other things, were focused on discovering the motivation of programs for pursuing the internationalization certification, what they hoped to obtain with the certification, what the perceived advantages and disadvantages of obtaining the certification have been, and whether or not they are satisfied with the certification.

4.5. Data analysis and operationalization

After the rounds of interviews were completed, I transcribed the interviews. Once transcribed, the interview transcripts were put through 2 rounds of in vivo coding. In vivo coding refers to the process of 'highlighting' words or parts in a transcript that stand out or are representative of the whole answer given by the participant (Saldaña, 2011). Once the list of codes was completed, similar codes were grouped together and different categories of conceptual codes were created. These codes were used to analyze the data.

4.6. Limitations & recommendations

I conducted this research to find out more about the use of voluntary certifications in non-private sectors, specifically the use of the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* in Dutch higher education programs. I believe that gaining a better understanding of the mechanisms and motivations behind the adoption of voluntary certification schemes will enhance research on private (self-) regulation and the development and adoption of private certification schemes.

This research was conducted with utmost care and accuracy. However, I am aware that

there are areas in this research that can further be improved with subsequent research. First, when it comes to the *transferability* of the research, I have to say that since the research consisted of a small number of participants, causality cannot be established. For generalization purposes, further research should (attempt to) include a larger sample. As previously mentioned, a total of 20 program coordinators were approached with a request for an interview. As the reader might imagine, I was dependent on the willingness and availability of participants. Ideally, it would have been great to have a larger and more representative sample containing an equal amount of HBO and WO programs, and an equal amount of small versus large programs. This would make comparison between groups possible and allow us to see if there are significant differences in motivations depending on the previously mentioned factors.

Second, while I believe that semi-structured interviews worked well for the purpose of this research, in the future, it could be helpful to employ multiple ways of data collection. This would allow for more accurate conclusions using the process of triangulation (Saldaña, 2011), and would therefore enhance the *credibility* of the research. Additionally, while I only interviewed coordinators of programs that had obtained the distinctive quality feature for internationalization, it might be interesting to interview programs that have obtained other, similar voluntary quality assurance certifications. It might also be interesting to interview programs that have deliberately refrained from pursuing the certificate to understand what motivated this decision.

Lastly, as described previously, programs were first approached via e-mail. Several rounds of reminder e-mails followed before programs were contacted via telephone. In the future, it would be less time-consuming to follow the first round of e-mails with telephone calls. It would also be beneficial to take into consideration what period of time one wants to conduct research in, as universities are unavailable during holidays. Additionally, I wanted the participants to be as comfortable as possible, so they were given the option of doing the interview via telephone or Skype. In the future, it might be better to conduct all interviews in person. This allows for non-verbal cues to be observed and enhances the quality of the conversation. The recordings of in-person interviews were of a much better quality than the recordings of telephone or Skype calls, which makes the process of transcribing the interviews less difficult and leaves little room for error.

Chapter 5: Findings

I conducted this research with the purpose of analyzing the motivation behind higher education programs' adoption of the voluntary certification scheme by the NVAO, the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. The first three chapters in this thesis presented literature that analyzed the mechanisms, advantages and disadvantages of private certification schemes as well as the motivations for adoption. In the previous chapter, I presented the methodology in regards to the research. In this chapter, I will present the results obtained during the semi-structured interviews with nine program coordinators of universities (of applied science) that have obtained the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. These results are related to the research questions: a. What are the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization? And b. What is the effect of the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization on higher education institutions' academic programs? In this chapter, I will look at the obtained results regarding programs' motivations for adopting the distinctive quality feature, as well as the effect that the certification has had on programs.

5.1. Motivations

As was mentioned in the methodology section, I asked several questions to enhance the dependability of the findings. When it comes to the variable of motivation, participants were asked directly what the motivations guiding their adoption of the distinctive quality feature were, why their 'regular' accreditation wasn't enough, as well as who the initiator of the certification adoption process was. A summary of the key ideas is found below:

Table 2. Key ideas on motivation.

Participant	Initiator	Motivation	Code
Participant 1	Program team	"Being special would help us to stand in the spotlight"	"spotlight"
		"The main motivation was to be special"	"be special"
		"The main reason was publicity and we wanted to see that our program was doing great"	"publicity"
		"We wanted to be visible for international students"	"be visible"
Participant 2	Program team	"given the fact that we are an international program and that we really see the added value of the international dimension […] let's see if we can consolidate this and make it visible for the outside world"	"added value" / "visible"
		"…to stand out as an international business program"	"stand out"
Participant 3	Program team	"If more institutions use the qualification framework, it's much easier to compare curricula and work together"	"work together"

		"We believe there should be an international teaching and learning environment"	"international teaching and learning environment"
		"We believe it is important to have proper international accreditation"	"proper international accreditation"
Participant 4	Program team	"I thought it is a kind of marketing instrument. I wanted this thing on my website"	"marketing instrument"
		"If all programs in the Netherlands have this distinctive feature and we don't, what impression do we make?"	"impression"
Participant 5	Combination; program manager, program staff & university board	"…the management was very keen to have a program with such a certificate in their portfolio because it helps them in their marketing"	"marketing"
		"We wish to build a European Occupational Therapist student within Europe strongly"	"student"
Participant 6	Program manager	"On one hand, it's because we think we deserved it"	"we deserved it"
		"Another reason for applying is that we strongly believe that students deserve to know that their program is one of the exceptional ones in	"students"

		internationalization"	
		"Obviously, reputation enhancement is also an important consideration"	"reputation enhancement"
Participant 7	Program coordinator & program director	"This extra certificate has an internal value. It forces you to rethink everything: why are we doing this? Are we doing it in a right way? That was very valuable. The other is to attract more students"	"internal value" / "attract more students"
Participant 8	Department of quality (institution)	"…to encourage the internationalization of the full curriculum of this particular program and to sustain it, to make it more complete in terms of what internationalization means"	"curriculum"
Participant 9	Program manager	"First of all, it's the acknowledgement of the NVAO that you can call yourself an international program or that you can position yourself internationally"	"acknowledgement"
		"it's an indicator of how well we're doing"	"indicator"

5.1.1. Analysis

Participants gave a wide range of responses on the question of their motivation behind the adoption of the distinctive quality feature for internationalization. Responses ranged from 'wanting to stand out' and 'wanting to be special' to feeling 'they deserved it' and seeing the great 'internal value' of the certification. The case of participant 1 was especially interesting, as he explained that his program had pursued the certification to keep the program going, as they had found themselves in a danger zone due to small enrollment numbers. His program believed that having the distinctive quality feature for internationalization would help them stand out against the bigger and more popular programs in their university. Participant 2 also offered an interesting reason for pursuing the quality feature, which he himself had said was a 'negative' reason: *"You may know that as a business school [...] it is very important to be in the international rankings of business programs. We are part of many rankings [...] but so far there has never been a ranking by the Financial Times of undergraduate programs. We had been in touch with the Financial Times (FT) to see if FT would be willing to launch an international ranking on business programs and in particular international English business programs. The answer was no. So, this was one of the reasons to explore other options to stand out as an international business program"*. Participant 6 elaborated on the program team's strong desire to improve their original assessment by stating: "*[The first time around] we didn't get the excellent feature but still a good assessment. So, in our policy, we said that we really wanted to get the excellent feature next time. So that was one of the drivers. We also strongly believe that our students deserve to know that their program is one of the exceptional programs in internationalization"*.

The findings showed a couple of recurrent themes. Firstly, the majority of the participants mentioned being motivated by a desire to 'stand out', to 'be special', or to 'be visible'. Similarly, many of the participants reported pursuing the distinctive quality feature to get 'acknowledgement', to 'enhance reputation', or because they believed they 'deserved' it. One participant even stated: "*If we don't get this certificate, who is going to get it*?" This again shows that programs are motivated by a desire to get the acknowledgement they think they deserve. Overall, five out of nine participants gave answers relating to this category. Another recurring theme was the category of 'marketing', which could be found in answers of four out of nine participants. Specifically, participants mentioned wanting to 'work together' with other partners,

wanting to use the distinctive quality feature on their website as a 'marketing instrument', and wanting to 'attract more students'. All in all, programs made it clear that they didn't get the certificate just for the sake of getting it, but that the certificate was a means of obtaining something else. Lastly, another recurrent theme could be found in participants' view of the feature as being an 'indicator' of where their program stands in terms of internationalization, as a certificate that carries an 'internal value', and as a means of adapting their 'curriculum' to international standards. Participant 8 was especially explicit in stating that his program had chosen to pursue the distinctive quality feature in an attempt to "*encourage the internationalization of the full curriculum of this particular program and to sustain it, to make it more complete in terms of what internationalization means*". Answers relating to this 'internal value' could be found in seven out of nine interviews.

Interestingly, if we look at the answers given by the participants, one of the things that can be noticed is that 'marketing advantages' was never mentioned as the sole reason for pursuing the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization. Every time the participants gave an answer related to 'marketing advantages' it was in combination with either 'acknowledgment' or 'improvement' as a motivation. There were, however, participants who gave answers related to the category of 'acknowledgment' and 'improvement' as the sole reason for pursuing certification. One explanation for this could be that programs recognize that the initial purpose of the certification is not to attract more students but to show that they comply with the internationalization standards designed by the NVAO. After all, as participant 1 stated: "*When you're from Colombia or China, you just ask whether you can afford the school. So whether [the school] has a certificate for internationalization…what the heck, you know*?"

Another interesting pattern that I found in the data was that out of the seven participants who mentioned being motivated by 'improvement' in their pursuit of the distinctive quality feature six were from universities of applied science (HBO). That means that all the HBO program coordinators that were interviewed for this research were motivated by 'improvement'. If we look at the program coordinators from university programs (WO) we will see that only one out of the three interviewed mentioned 'improvement' as a motivation for the adoption of the distinctive quality feature. This is not to say that university program coordinators don't consider the category of 'improvement' important, but that the HBO program coordinators that took part in this research were more explicitly motivated by a desire to 'improve', whether that'd be their

curriculum or their own internal education processes. I believe that this is related to the fact that the value of internationalization has been really emphasized over the years and its advantages highly publicized. Programs want to meet high internationalization standards, not just because of the advantages, but because they genuinely believe that internationalization is the way to go when it comes to current higher education. I believe that the difference between university programs and university of applied science programs could be attributed to the fact that generally speaking, universities were exposed to the concept of internationalization much earlier than universities of applied sciences were. By the time universities of applied science learnt of internationalization, universities had already been consciously or unconsciously pursuing internationalization objectives for decades. Universities of applied science are generally less experienced in terms of internationalization and might be more motivated by a desire to improve than their more experienced university counterparts.

When it comes to 'marketing advantages' we see that three out four programs who admitted to being motivated by 'marketing advantages' are programs belonging to universities of applied science (HBO). Only one out of the three interviewed university program coordinators (WO) mentioned being motivated by 'marketing advantages'. I believe that this is because universities and university programs have often time existed for much longer than universities of applied science have, and have therefore enjoyed a longstanding publicity which have allowed them to establish their fair share of partners over the years, as well as attract their fair share of (international) students. Universities of applied science (HBO) are typically younger and less well known internationally than universities (WO) and may therefore be more eager to attract (international) students and establish partnerships with other institutions.

In the case of 'acknowledgment', there is a reversal. Out of the five program coordinators who admitted to being motivated by a desire to get 'acknowledgment' three were university program coordinators (WO). That means that all three of the interviewed university program coordinators stated that they were motivated to pursue the distinctive quality feature in an attempt to get acknowledgment. In comparison, only two of the HBO program coordinators stated that they were motivated by a similar desire. Why does 'acknowledgment' seem to be more important for WO programs than HBO programs? I believe that a big part of a university's appeal is its reputation, its so-called prestige, and its legitimacy. If a university loses its

legitimacy, it loses everything. Programs belonging to universities of applied science often don't faze the same kind of scrutiny that university programs faze. So, university programs may feel more pressure to deliver the best education that they can, to produce the best graduates and researchers that they can and most importantly, to validate their reputation through external auditing and acknowledgement.

So, to summarize, five out nine of our participants were motivated to pursue the NVAO distinctive quality feature to be more visible and get acknowledgment, four out of nine were motivated by marketing advantages and seven out of nine were motivated by a desire to improve the quality of their education. I will now take a look at the findings related to the second research question.

5.2. Effects

The second research question relates to the impact that adopting the distinctive quality feature for internationalization has had on the university (of applied science) programs that took part in this research. Does the certification make any difference to programs, or is it just an extra but otherwise empty adornment on their website? The participants were asked questions relating to the following topics: the perceived advantages of having the certification, the perceived disadvantages, the impact of the certification on the program, and their overall satisfaction with the certification.

Table 3. Key ideas on effects.

Participant	Advantages	Disadvantages	Impact	Satisfaction (1-5)
Participant 1	"In practice it turned out to be a failure. Nothing really changed because of the accreditation"	"It was a hassle. I had to collect all these data. So, it's time and effort".	"The impact wasn't big. We got a confirmation that we had a good program. But the certification didn't change much for us"	"It's hard to say because we have done nothing with it. We have not seen any publicity or impact of this certification"
Participant 2	"It really proves that we are good at internationalization"	"It is pretty time-consuming"	We were recommended to "require our students to write their bachelor thesis on a truly international topic"	4.
Participant 3		"The framework that was developed for this is very prescriptive, and it didn't exactly fit into our situation"	"Not so much, because we basically wrote down the things that we were already doing" "So far, I really can't say it has helped us"	"I don't know if we would do it again. For us, international accreditation through [name organization] is much more important"
Participant 4	"It might possibly help us in the future because let's say if all programs in the Netherlands have this distinctive feature and we don't…we miss the boat" "We can say: Look here! Learn something	"I wrote a paper on it for a conference. It was about surviving accreditations without demotivating the academic staff" "It is bureaucracy. It's all of paperworks"	"We now know that we need to store our research paper scripts"	4.

	from us! We can be small but we are important because we have this distinctive feature"			
Participant 5	"Good marketing"	"Time-consuming process. The process was an investment, therefore money because time is money"		"Between 4 and 5".
Participant 6	"When you are looking for new partners, it is something that is quite good to have it" "It makes us visible as programs"	"You have to invest a lot of time in documenting everything" "People do grow tired of this"	"What improved was the way we formulate the learning outcome. So the international/intercultural is much more explicit and articulate" "Colleagues now realize what their contribution is. The internationalization is sometimes seen as part of elitist groups, but everyone has a role to play" "We strengthened our approach in internationalization in making it visibly comprehensive"	5.
Participant 7	"Internally, we are now more critical on our	"It is a huge amount of work. You have to pay	"The impact was not so much on the program	5.

	processes and assessment in international cultural field and international skills" "Externally, we can now prove to our students that if they are interested in quality and want to obtain international competences and skills they had better go to [name school]".	about 2000 euro, but also, you have to work internally to get everything on paper. That is really a huge amount of paperwork"	itself but for ourselves to get clear insights. The certificate helps to make things more visible, gives a better overview of things" "Students have to do an assignment that is related to their intercultural skills while abroad" "It made the staffs a bit more aware of the importance of the internationalization" "We are trying to hire more international lecturers"	
Participant 8	"It helps when we want to attract more students and we can claim that we are international" "It helps with international partnership to keep our international position strong, so for external communication"	"In general, the time and effort are not worthy. If you take efforts vs. benefits it is not worthy, because it takes a lot of effort to do this and keep it".	"We continued to run the program as we did. So, I don't think it changed anything" "It did create a bit of awareness but it did not change the way we deliver the our program"	4 to 5.
Participant 9	"The good thing about the certificate is that	"Efforts, extra time"	"You need to go through the list of indicators,	4.

| | you are being pushed and forced to look at your internal process, to look at the quality management, at the quality of the program". | | which helps you to try and adjust the program and try to say okay, let's get it done. The program changes in this respect. But afterwards, once you have it, it doesn't have any impact on the program any longer" | |

5.2.1. Advantages

The participants were asked to describe some the advantages that they have experienced from obtaining the distinctive quality feature for internationalization. Their answers to this question might give more insight into their motivation for pursuing the certification. As can be seen in the table, not all participants were enthusiastic about the certification. Participant 1 very honestly stated that his program did not experience any advantages to having the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*: "*In practice, it turned out to be a failure. We put it on our website and at school we made a little publicity about it, but in respect to attracting international students or the quality of our program nothing really changed*". During the interview, the participants were also asked about what they were expecting to obtain from the certification. Participant 1 had then stated that he did not have any expectations in regards to the certification. However, participant 1 was not the only participant that was not enthusiastic about the certification. Participant 2 stated that the certificate is very difficult to notice and is therefore mainly for the program staff. Participant 3, also, doesn't believe having the certificate has helped his program in any way. He doesn't believe students look at or care about the feature. He believes that the only advantage is that by obtaining the feature they received confirmation that their approach to their program is the right one and that their program does indeed have the right to call itself international. This is useful in relation to the NVAO, as the program is taken a bit more seriously. Finally, participant 5 said not to know whether there were any advantages to having the certification before finally saying that the advantage was 'good marketing'. Contrary to these participants, other participants were a bit more positive. Participant 4 stated that the advantage of having the certificate was that they could be taken more seriously. They could say to people that even though they are a small program they had obtained the feature and therefore have the right to call themselves international. Another advantage is that the certificate gave them more confidence when talking to prospective students. Participant 6 stated that having the distinctive quality feature is a huge advantage in terms of forming new partnerships and being more visible to the outside: "*What we do notice is that, for example, when you are looking for new partners, it's quite good to have it. Not all schools would like to do business with you but if you say you obtained the distinctive feature for internationalization, they will say: "Oh, okay!" So that is pretty special, since it opens up doors to maybe new partners*". Participant 7 made a distinction between internal and external benefits when explaining what he thought were the

advantages of having the distinctive quality feature. When it comes to the internal advantages, participant 7 stated that his program was now more critical on their processes and assessment of international skills. The reason why they were critical was that they genuinely want to offer education that is of a high quality. Externally, the advantage is that they can prove to their students that they can indeed teach them international competences and skills. Participant 8 mentioned several advantages of having the distinctive quality feature. First of all, his program believes that the feature helps to attract more students and makes it possible for them to say that they are international. Secondly, the certificate helps with external communication; it helps when trying to establish international partnerships. Finally, participant 9, similar to participant 1, stated that they weren't using the certificate for any marketing purposes, and that the certificate, therefore, didn't bring any specific advantages.

A couple of recurring answers could be found in the data. First of all, five out of our nine participants reported perceiving an advantage to having the certification. One recurring advantage was related to the issue of confirmation. Many participants considered the fact that they got confirmation that the program is good as one of the advantages of having the certification. Similarly, participants considered it an advantage to be able to say that they are indeed international. There were also the participants who were less enthusiastic about the certification and believed that it had no advantage. This was the case for three of the participants. Of these, participant 1 felt that the certification was a failure in attracting students, participant 3 felt that students didn't look at or care about the certification, and participant 9 said there were no advantages because they were not using the certification as a marketing tool to attract more students. The common thread here is the 'lack of students'. Since they were not attracting more students, they did not consider the certification to have any advantages. This means that, unconsciously, these participants expected there to be an effect (following the adoption of the certification) in the form of more students. So, the reason for these participants' lack of enthusiasm towards the certification does not have so much to do with the certification itself as it has to do with an expectation that the certification failed to fulfill.

5.2.2. Disadvantages

Secondly, in an attempt to analyze the effects of the certification on programs, participants were asked to share what they thought were some of the costs or disadvantages related to the

distinctive quality feature. Participants responded to this question as following: Participant 1 felt that obtaining the certificate was a hassle. First, a lot of data needed to be collected, which took a lot of time and effort of the program coordinator. Then, the program coordinator needed to write a report with the data that had been collected, which was also extensive and time-consuming. Then, the program had to plan and organize a full-day visit by an NVAO panel consisting of 6 people, who wanted to speak to everyone in the program. So, all in all, participant 1 felt that there were a lot of costs and few benefits. Participant 2 mentioned that there was a small financial contribution that needed to be paid for the accreditation but he was also quick to point out that it was "*not big money*". So the cost was mainly the effort it takes to prepare for the certification. Participant 3 also stated that he thought the process of obtaining the certificate was a hassle. This was in part because they felt like the framework for the certificate was very prescriptive and left little room for deviations. The participant felt like the framework didn't really fit with their particular situation, so it was difficult having to work around that. Participant 4 explained that one of the problems they experienced, not just with this certificate, but with other certificates they had obtained in the past, was that they felt that it was a lot of work and that this was de-motivating the academic staff. He mentioned the amount of paperwork that needed to be prepared for the NVAO and said that he thought the whole process was too bureaucratic. Participant 5 felt that obtaining the certificate was a very time-consuming process and therefore a big investment because time is money. Participant 6 said that they had to invest a lot of time in documenting everything and writing their official proposal. This was a time-consuming process, especially because a lot of things weren't explicitly formulated, documented or justified yet, so the program coordinator and his colleague had to first get their paperwork right. They also had to invest a lot of time talking to different other colleagues to determine how to disseminate the philosophy of their program. For participant 7, besides the monetary fee that had to be paid, the costs were mostly related to the paperwork that had to be prepared. Collecting all of it and writing the proposal was a lot of hard work, but participant 7 is quick to say that this was a very useful process. Participant 8 felt that, in the case of the distinctive quality feature, the rewards do not outweigh the efforts. Obtaining the certificate is a very time-consuming process, with lots of evaluations and lots of paperwork. Participant 9 felt that the biggest costs were the time and effort that had to be invested in writing the official proposal.

The first surprising thing about this category is that none of our participants reported

experiencing any disadvantages of the certification on their program. The disadvantages reported by the participants were all related to the process of obtaining the certification. About this process, the biggest complaint found in the data was that the process of adoption was time-consuming and required a lot of effort. This was mentioned by five out of our nine participants. Other than that, participants considered the amount of paperwork and the staff demotivation to be the biggest disadvantages of the certification. Again, both of these are related to the process and not so much the certification itself. This could partially be related to what participant 9 said in his interview: "*You need to go through the list of indicators, which helps you to try to adjust the program and try to say okay, let's get it done. Let's implement this. The program changes in this respect. But afterwards, once you have it, it doesn't have any impact on the program any longer.* The certification is an assessment of a university's current internationalization standard. That means that the assessment or certification itself does not have any influence on the program. It is the program that has an influence on the assessment and therefore on whether the program gets the certification or not. This also brings me to my next point:

5.2.3. Impact on Program

I wanted to hear directly from participants how they felt that adopting the certification had impacted their program. They gave a range of responses, which can be found below:

Participant 1 felt that the impact on the program wasn't big. They received a confirmation that they had a good program and they learned how to structure information, but other than that, the program remained the same. The same was the case for participant 3, who believes nothing about the program had changed either before or after obtaining the certification, and participants 5 and 8, who also stated that nothing had changed about their program. On the contrary, participant 2 believes that the certification did have an impact to a certain extent, as the NVAO panel that visited them had suggested that they should require their students to write their theses on an international topic, which is something that they had not previously done. Another suggestion, which they have not yet worked on, was to find a way to actually 'prove' their students' intercultural skills. So, according to participant 2, the impact of the distinctive quality feature on a program will depend largely on whether the NVAO gives any suggestions to the program and whether the program chooses to follow up on these. According to participant 4, one difference

that preparing for the certification has brought to their program is that they now store all their students' research papers, which they had not previously done. Now they also have a more elaborate feedback form for the papers of their students, so, they don't just write a few lines but they put effort into giving their students proper feedback on all their papers. Participant 6 was the participant that reported experiencing the biggest impact on their program. He stated that the certificate brought along a couple of changes: First, one thing that changed was the way the program formulates its learning outcomes. The international and intercultural dimension of the program is much more explicitly articulated in their learning outcomes. The other impact has been the awareness that has been created under members of the staff about the importance of their contribution to internationalization. Staff members now understand that internationalization is not reserved for the elitists on the staff that always get to travel, but that everyone has a role to play. Finally, participant 6 believes that his program has strengthened their approach in internationalization as it is now a lot more comprehensive than it had been in the past. Obtaining the certificate has 'tuned' everyone on the staff to be aware of where they are and where they need to go as a program. Participant 7 stated that the program itself did not change after obtaining the certification but that what did change was that the certificate helped to give the staff a better overview of things. The staff has become much more aware of the importance of internationalization. The program now hires more international teaching staff and also requires their students to do an assignment related to their intercultural skills when they are abroad. Finally, as previously mentioned, participant 9 explained that while preparing their official proposal for the NVAO they went through the list of indicators and adjusted things where necessary. So he believes that the program changed partially because of the NVAO's internationalization indicators. But after they had obtained the certificate, no further changes were made to the program.

The data showed a couple of small clusters when it comes to the impact that the distinctive quality feature has had on participants' programs. First, there were two programs who stated that the certification had had a direct impact on their curriculum and what they require from their students. In the case of the first program (participant 2), the impact was a direct result of a suggestion provided by the NVAO. In the case of the second (participant 7), the change was a result of the awareness that had been created under the staff following the adoption of the certification. Another two programs reported differences in the coordination and administration

of the program as a result of the distinctive quality feature (participant 4 and 6). Finally, there were three programs who reported an internationalization of their staff following the adoption of the feature. Participants reported higher awareness levels among staff members, as well as the hiring of more international staff members.

So, to summarize, the perceived impact of the distinctive quality feature was mostly related to *student requirements* (writing their thesis on an international topic, proving their intercultural skills through assignments), *program coordination and administration* (storing research papers, providing students with more elaborate feedback on papers, formulating more explicit learning outcomes) and *staff awareness* (creating more staff awareness, providing staff with better overview of teaching requirements, hiring more international staff).

5.2.4. Satisfaction

Previously, the advantages, disadvantages and impact that the distinctive quality feature for internationalization has had on programs was shown. Now, let's take a look at the level of satisfaction that programs experience towards the distinctive quality feature. The participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being 'not so satisfied' and 5 being 'extremely satisfied'), how satisfied they were with the distinctive quality feature and why. Participants were also asked whether they would recommend the feature to others.

Participant 1 said it was difficult for him to say how satisfied he was with the certificate because his program had not done anything with it and it had no impact on the program. He doesn't think he would do it again and when it comes to recommending it to other programs, he says that he had not yet done so because other programs at his university are already very big and international, so obtaining the certificate would not make much sense. Participant 2 said that on a scale of 1 to 5 his satisfaction with the certificate was a 4. The reason why he did not give a 5 is that the certificate will become invisible in short due to the development of the ECA certificate. Because of this, they will have to explain the certificate more to outsiders. However, if they had to do it again, they would, since they don't want to lose the certification. Participant 2 also said that they would definitely recommend it to other programs but only if those programs are serious about the international dimension of their program. If other programs believe that there is added value in having an explicit international dimension in their program, they should definitely

consider it. If not, then it would be a useless job. Participant 3 also had a hard time giving a scale for his programs' satisfaction with the certificate. He believes that for his program, accreditation through other organizations would be more important. He doesn't believe having the NVAO certificate has helped his program in any particular way and doesn't think they would do it again. He also wouldn't necessarily recommend the certificate to other programs. He believes that only those who have an international profile should maybe consider it. Participant 4 rated his satisfaction with the certificate at a 4 and stated that he would recommend it even to the programs that don't necessarily want to pursue it, because there is a lot to be learned even from checking the requirements. Participant 5 rated his satisfaction with the certificate at right between a 4 and a 5. He would recommend the certificate to others but only if they believe they fit the criteria. If internationalization in itself is not important and they are only doing it for marketing, then they are unlikely to get it. So participant 5 would only recommend the certificate to other programs if they believe they fit the criteria. Participant 6 rated his satisfaction with the certificate at a 5. However, participant 6 also believes that not all programs are advanced enough to apply for this feature. In order to apply, other programs need to have something in place. Otherwise it would be really time-consuming. Participant 7 gave a 5 for satisfaction but was quick to point out that he was not sure what the value of the certificate is in international circles because when you approach potential partner programs, the first thing they ask is whether the program has an international accreditation. So, according to the participant, the distinctive feature doesn't have much value in the international field. Because of this, the participant would not pursue the NVAO certification again. However, he would recommend it to other programs because he thinks the certificate has a great value internally. It gives a good idea of how to test and assess skills and attitudes, which are usually harder to assess than knowledge. Participant 8 rated his satisfaction at a 4.5 because they appreciate the feature. His program would also do it again if they were given the opportunity, because just being able to mention that they have been approved as highly internationalized is very helpful. Participant 8 would also recommend the certificate to other programs, but only if they are truly international. Otherwise, they most likely will not get it.

Finally, participant 9 rated this satisfaction with the distinctive quality feature at a 4. He appreciates the acknowledgement, however, the certificate doesn't bring anything extra. He would still recommend it to other programs because he believes the certificate can be used as a tool for other programs to become more internationalized.

There were two participants who had a hard time giving an answer to this question (participant 1, participant 3). In the case of participant 1, he said that: "*It's hard to say because we have done nothing with it. We have not seen any publicity or any impact of this certificate. It did not imply that more students were coming to us or that students asked about the certificate*". Participant 3 went a little further in saying: "*I don't know if we would do it again. Because for us, international accreditation through [name organization] is much more important. For the next time, I'm not entirely sure if this is something we would do again. Because so far, I really can't say it has helped us*". Two participants reported being very satisfied (scale 4) with the quality feature. Another two reported being extremely satisfied (scale 5) with the quality feature. The last two measured their satisfaction right between a 4 and a 5.

A recurrent theme in the data was the issue of whether or not participants would recommend the distinctive quality feature to other programs. Out of our nine participants, six of them said that they would recommend the quality feature to other programs. However, four of them stated that they would only *conditionally* recommend the quality feature. This idea can be summarized by what participant 2 said: "*I would only recommend it to other programs if you are serious about the international dimension of your program. If you are actually already actively doing it, if there's added value for you to have this very outspoken international dimension in your program, you can consider the quality feature. The other way around, if you're not active in the field and you decide to pursue the quality feature, it is a useless job. I would never recommend that*". Overall, we see that participants were generally satisfied with the distinctive quality feature, and most of them said that they would recommend the feature to other programs.

The participants that reported the highest satisfaction (scale 5) were participants 6 and 7. Participants 6 and 7 both belong to universities of applied science (HBO). The next respondents who reported the highest satisfaction (scale 4.5) were participants 8 and 5. Both of these participants also belong to universities of applied science (HBO). This means that the four programs reporting the highest level of satisfaction in our research are all HBO programs. On the contrary, if we look at the WO programs, we see that one participant expressed extreme

dissatisfaction with the distinctive quality feature, while the other two both rated their satisfaction at a 4. While not necessarily a bad score, it is still lower than the scores their HBO colleagues gave. This brings me to the following point.

5.3. Relationship between motivation and satisfaction

As was just explained in the previous paragraph, participants belonging to universities of applied science (HBO) reported higher satisfaction levels than participants belonging to universities. What could be the reason for this? I previously hypothesized that the programs who chose to adopt the distinctive quality feature for internationalization out of intrinsic reasons (self-improvement) would be more satisfied with the certificate than the programs that chose to certify for extrinsic reasons (reputation, market advantages, top-down pressure).

During the interviews, there were five programs that mentioned self-improvement as either a primary or secondary motivation for pursuing the distinctive quality feature. These were programs 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8. These programs' responses to the question of satisfaction can be found in the following table:

Table 4. Reported satisfaction of intrinsically motivated programs.

Participant	Satisfaction	Would recommend?	Would try again?
2	4	Yes	Yes
3	-	No	No
6	5	Yes	Yes
7	5	Yes	No
8	4.5	Yes	Yes

In the table, we see that three of our four highest scoring programs on the satisfaction scale belong to the group of (primarily) intrinsically motivated programs (participants 6, 7, and 8). When it comes to extrinsic motivation, four of the nine participants reported being (primarily) extrinsically motivated. These were participants 1, 4, 5 and 9. Of these four, three belonged to the group of least-satisfied programs (participants 1, 4 and 9). I believe the findings show that there is indeed a relationship between motivation and satisfaction.

Table 5. Reported satisfaction of extrinsically motivated programs.

Participant	Satisfaction	Would recommend?	Would try again?
1	-	No	No
4	4	Yes	Yes
5	4.5	Yes	Not sure
9	4	Yes	No

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this research was twofold. First, I wanted to discover what the motivations are behind higher education programs' desire to pursue the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. I had previously hypothesized that the motivations of programs would be one of either the following categories: *acknowledgment*, including a desire to avoid public pressure and criticism and a desire to receive acknowledgement and validation and improve their reputation, *marketing advantages*, referring to a desire to attract more (international) students and to establish or strengthen relationships with (potential) partners, *improvement*, related to a desire to improve the quality of education for students and improve overall staff awareness on internationalization, and finally, *top-down pressure*, which relates to programs pursuing the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* after being encouraged or demanded by their superiors.

Secondly, I wanted to know what impact having the distinctive quality feature for internationalization would have on the respective program. I had previously hypothesized that programs who adopt the NVAO distinctive quality feature for intrinsic reasons (*improvement*) would be more satisfied than those who adopt certification for extrinsic reasons (*top-down pressure, market advantages* or *acknowledgment*). Additionally, I hypothesized that programs who make the decision to adopt certification at the program-level are more satisfied than programs who adopt certification following a decision made at a higher level.

This chapter will provide an interpretation of the previously described findings. The findings will first be related to previous research, which was also used as the basis for the theoretical framework. Then, the findings will be viewed in the context of the hypotheses. Finally, I will discuss the findings and some personal observations.

6.1. Findings in relation to research questions

6.1.1. First research question

The first research question was: What are the motivations of higher education institutions for voluntarily adopting the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization? Participants gave a range of answers to this question, but from the data, I found three main clusters. The first

cluster was related to programs' desire to 'stand out', 'be visible', 'be special', get 'confirmation' and get 'acknowledgment'. For analysis purposes, I called this cluster '*acknowledgement*'. At the core of these answers was a desire to be noticed and valued by others (students, prospective students, potential partners). This theme emerged across five of the nine interviews. Another cluster was related to programs' desire to improve 'marketing', 'establish partnerships', 'work together' and 'attract more (international) students'. This theme emerged across four of the nine interviews. I shall call this cluster '*marketing*'. The last cluster related to programs' desire to have an 'indicator' of where they stand in terms of internationalization, the perceived 'internal value' of the quality feature, and a desire to improve their 'curriculum'. This theme emerged across seven out of the nine interviews. I shall call this cluster '*improvement*'. So, the findings of this research suggest that higher education programs adopt the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* to get acknowledgement, to employ it as a marketing tool and to improve their program.

6.1.2. Second research question

The second research question was: What is the effect of the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization on higher education institutions' academic programs? The participants were asked, among other things, what advantages they have experienced from having the distinctive quality feature, what disadvantages, and whether or not they believed the certificate had had an impact on their respective program.

I first looked at the perceived advantages that programs experienced from having the distinctive quality feature for internationalization. One of the recurrent themes when it comes to advantages was the fact that programs valued the fact that they could 'prove', through the quality feature, that they were indeed international. Another way that this was reported was as 'confirmation'. The advantage of pursuing the certification was that programs obtained confirmation that they are indeed as international as they say they are. Another advantage of the feature, according to one participant, was that the feature helped in attracting more international students and partners. Participants were also happy with the visibility that the certificate gave them, as they were able to attract more students. Unfortunately, none of these answers specifically demonstrate an effect on the program itself (staff, curriculum, students). It only has an effect on how the program is viewed or how the program views itself.

When it comes to the disadvantages of the certification, participants gave a wider range of answers. Seven of the participants mentioned that they felt the process to obtain the distinctive quality feature was too *time-consuming*. Seven of the participants also felt that the process demanded a lot of *effort* and hard work. Two participants mentioned that they experienced issues with *staff demotivation*. Two participants mentioned the *paperwork* that had to be prepared as one of the biggest problems they had with the certificate. Finally, two participants mentioned the *financial contribution* that had to be paid, but both felt this was not really an issue since it was not a big amount of money. Interestingly, none of the participants reported experiencing any disadvantages of the certification on their program itself (curriculum, staff, students). The disadvantages reported by the participants were all related to the *process* of obtaining the certification. Like I said in the Findings, this could partially be related to the fact that the certification is an assessment of a university's current internationalization standard. That means that the assessment or certification itself does not have any influence on the program. It is the program that has an influence on the assessment and therefore on whether the program gets the certification or not.

Finally, participants were also asked whether they believed that the certificate as a whole had any impact on their program. As expected, most participants believed that the distinctive quality feature for internationalization had indeed had an impact on their respective program. This impact was mostly related to changes brought to their *student requirements* (writing their thesis on an international topic, proving their intercultural skills through assignments), *program coordination and administration* (storing research papers, providing students with more elaborate feedback on papers, formulating more explicit learning outcomes) and *staff awareness* (creating more staff awareness, providing staff with better overview of teaching requirements, hiring more international staff).

I was also interested in exploring the levels of satisfaction that programs experienced from having the distinctive quality feature. Overall, programs reported being satisfied with the distinctive quality feature. I had previously hypothesized that more intrinsically motivated programs would have higher satisfaction levels than more extrinsically motivated programs. The findings of this research showed that three of the intrinsically motivated programs were in the top 4 of programs with the highest satisfaction level. Likewise, three of the extrinsically motivated programs were in the bottom 4 of programs with the highest satisfaction level. The

distinctive quality feature for internationalization seems to have an effect on satisfaction only and for as long programs are intrinsically motivated.

6.2. Findings in relation to hypotheses

In regards to the previously established hypotheses of this research, the following can be seen in the findings: The findings showed that the desire for 'acknowledgement' is an important motivational factor for higher education institutions to adopt the NVAO *distinctive quality feature for internationalization*. At the core of this desire for acknowledgment is a desire for public validation and visibility. Darnall (2006), Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) and Welch, Mori and Aoyagui-Usui (2002) had previously theorized, that public pressure is a key reason for why programs adopt voluntary certifications. This public pressure is not just related to external pressure from consumers or other third parties, but also to organizations' pro-active pursuit of acknowledgment and validation. Therefore, I believe that the findings of this research support the hypothesis.

Secondly, the findings showed that 'marketing' is another important motivational factor for Dutch higher education programs' adoption of the distinctive quality feature. These marketing advantages refer to a program's ability to appeal itself to potential stakeholders, their ability to turn that appeal into increased demand for their program, attracting a larger number of (international) students, being able to form relevant (international) partnerships, and improvement of the market position. These findings are in accordance with Darnall (2006) and Potoski and Prakash (2005) who also see that marketing advantages as one of the key reasons why programs pursue voluntary certification.

Thirdly, we see that, as Rondinelli and Vastag (2000) have argued, the adoption of certifications offer significant operational, managerial and competitive benefits to organizations. Adoption of the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* led to more awareness, both of students and staff members, more operational effectiveness, such as better formulation of learning outcomes and more intercultural dimensions in the education, and more operational efficiency, such as better systems of thesis storage and more elaborate feedback forms for students. None of the participants, however, reported experiencing higher levels of productivity as Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006) had previously argued.

Finally, contrary to what Darnall (2006) argued, none of the programs were either

encouraged or demanded by the top-level layers of their university to pursue the NVAO distinctive quality feature for internationalization. The decision to pursue the NVAO certification was made at the program level in all 9 of the participating programs.

6.3. Discussion

As I previously described in Chapter 1, the distinctive *quality feature for internationalization* assessment framework was created by the NVAO to "limit the interpretation of what […] internationalization means" (Aerden et al., 2013, p. 61). In this sense, I believe that the NVAO has succeeded, at least when it comes to the programs that took part in this research. Time after time during the interview rounds participants emphasized that internationalization was more than just speaking English in the classroom or having international lecturers every once in a while. And since all programs who took part in this research were on the same page in terms of what constitutes internationalization and what doesn't, I believe the distinctive quality feature fulfills the purpose for which it was created.

Looking at the motivations for the adoption of the distinctive quality feature, I found that the majority of programs adopted the certification out of a desire to improve their programs and 'comply' or 'adapt' to the NVAO's standard for internationalization. This tells me that programs are also aware of the feature's main purpose, which is to get programs to meet a certain standard of internationalization. The NVAO provides programs that are willing to adopt the distinctive quality feature with a set of indicators which they can then use to assess their programs and bring about the necessary changes to enhance the internationalization dimension in their programs. The NVAO then assesses the program to see if their standard is being met and whether there are areas where further improvement is needed. Depending on this, the NVAO will provide a program with suggestions; programs may choose to follow or not follow these suggestions. Looking at this process, I have to say that it is not the adoption of the feature which brings about this improvement in program's internationalization standard, but, it is the improvement in a program's level of internationalization that brings about the feature. As one participant suggested, the real changes happen *before* a program obtains the distinctive quality feature. Once a program has the feature, they are unlikely to change much about the program. So, technically speaking, the distinctive quality feature for internationalization is mainly the NVAO's *acknowledgment* of a program's level of internationalization. To the programs that are already

meeting the NVAO's set of indicators before applying for the distinctive quality feature for internationalization, and who therefore don't change anything about their programs, the improvement process is non-existent. In these cases, the distinctive quality feature again serves as an *acknowledgment* of the program rather than a tool for *improvement*. I am reminded of the research by Overdevest & Rickenbach (2006) who suggested that certifications operate as *signaling mechanisms* that serve to assure third parties that organizations meet certain desirable standards. Based on the findings, I believe that the NVAO's *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* also operates as a signaling mechanism.

Another interesting finding was that there were participants who attributed the adoption of the distinctive quality feature for internationalization to a desire to obtain *market advantages*, such as attracting more (international) students and/or establishing new (international) partnerships. However, this is a *desired outcome* on the part of the programs and not necessarily an *immediate effect* of the distinctive quality feature for internationalization. There were participants who mentioned during the interviews that they felt like the distinctive quality feature was a good *marketing tool*. Others didn't believe the feature succeeded in attracting more students. Again, others admitted to not even doing anything marketing related with the feature. In fact, using the feature as a *marketing tool* and actually obtaining *market advantages* from it are two completely different things. Personally, I have my doubts about whether the *distinctive quality feature for internationalization* is as effective as some of the participants suggested in attracting more students and partners. As an international student myself, I agree with participant 1 and 7's observation about how (international) students are more concerned with issues such as admission and tuition rather than whether or not their program has the distinctive quality feature or not. In many cases, unless (prospective) students specifically search for the distinctive quality feature for internationalization on the NVAO's website, there is no way of telling whether a program has the quality feature or not. Only a handful of programs advertise it on their websites, and so only a handful of programs can claim an increase in (international) student enrollments. The same can be said for (international) partnerships. To international partners, international certification schemes might be more familiar and therefore make more sense than a Dutch quality assurance certification. To establish whether or not the distinctive quality feature brings about marketing advantages, a comparison would have to be made between an institution's enrollment numbers prior to and after obtaining the *distinctive quality feature for*

internationalization. Secondly, random samples of students would have to be interviewed to see whether they are familiar with the quality feature and whether their enrollment in the university program was at all influenced by the distinctive quality feature. This is a study that goes beyond the scope of this research and would have to be conducted another time.

Appendix List.

Appendix A. List of Dutch programs with the distinctive quality feature for internationalization.

2015
1. European Public Health, wo-ba, University Maastricht
2. European Public Health, wo-ma, University Maastricht
3. Global Health, wo-ma, University Maastricht

2014
1. Global Supply Chain Management and Change, wo-ma, Universiteit Maastricht
2. Hoger Toeristisch en Recreatief Onderwijs, hbo-ba, NHTV internationale hogeschool Breda
3. Information and Network Economics, wo-ma, Universiteit Maastricht
4. International Bachelor's programme in Communication and Media, wo-ba, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
5. International Business, wo-ba, Universiteit Maastricht
6. International Business, wo-ma, Universiteit Maastricht
7. International Business and Management Studies, hbo-ba, Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen
8. Management of Learning, wo-ma, Universiteit Maastricht

2013
1. Universiteit Maastricht (instellingstoets)
2. Facility Management, hbo-ba, NHTV Internationale Hogeschool Breda
3. Hoger Hotelonderwijs, hbo-ba, NHTV Internationale Hogeschool Breda
4. International Business Administration, wo-ba, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
5. International Business and Management Studies, hbo-ba, Avans Hogeschool
6. International Business and Management Studies, hbo-ba, Hanzehogeschool
7. Muziek, hbo-ma, Koninklijk Conservatorium-Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag
8. Sonologie, hbo-ma, Koninklijk Conservatorium-Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag

2012
1. Wageningen Universiteit (instellingstoets)
2. Business Administration in Hotelmanagement, hbo-ba, Hotelschool Den Haag
3. Tourism Destination Management, hbo-ma, NHTV Internationale Hogeschool Breda

2011

1. hbo-ba, Koninklijk Conservatorium-Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag

2010
1. BSc in International Business, Universiteit Maastricht

2. MSc in International Business, Universiteit Maastricht
3. LL.M. International Criminal Law, Universiteit van Amsterdam
4. LL.M. European Private Law, Universiteit van Amsterdam
5. LL.M. International and European Law, Universiteit van Amsterdam
6. MSc in Human-Technology Interaction, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven
7. MSc in Innovation Sciences, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven
8. MSc in Engineering and Policy Analysis, Technische Universiteit Delft
9. Biology and Medical Laboratory Research, Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen
10. European MSc in Occupational Therapy, Hogeschool van Amsterdam
11. International Business and Management Studies (IBMS), Hogeschool van Amsterdam
12. International Business and Management Studies (IBMS), Fontys Hogescholen Eindhoven
13. MA in Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
14. BSc in International Business Administration, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
15. Bachelor in European Studies, De Haagse Hogeschool
16. Leraar voortgezet onderwijs van de tweede graad in Engels, Hogeschool van Amsterdam

Appendix B. List of programs that were approached for this research.

Program	University
1. Sonology	Royal conservatorium The Hague
2. Music	Royal conservatorium The Hague
3. BA Communication and Media	Erasmus University of Rotterdam
4. MA International and European Law	University of Amsterdam
5. MA International and Criminal Law	University of Amsterdam
6. MA European Private Law	University of Amsterdam
7. BA International Business Administration	Erasmus University of Rotterdam
8. MSc. Global Supply Chain Management and Change	Maastricht University
9. BSc. International Business	Maastricht University
10. European Studies	The Hague University of Applied Science
11. MA Development Studies	Erasmus University of Rotterdam

12. MSc. Engineering and Policy Analysis	Delft University of Technology
13. MSc. Occupational Therapy	Amsterdam University of Applied Science
14. International Business and Management Studies	Arnhem and Nijmegen University of Applied Science (HAN)
15. Business Administration in Hotel Management	Hotelschool The Hague
16. International Hotel Management	Internationale Hogeschool Breda
17. Tourism Destination Management	Internationale Hogeschool Breda
18. International Business Management Studies	Amsterdam University of Applied Science
19. International Business Administration	Avans University of Applied Science
20. European Public Health	Maastricht University

Appendix C. List of interview questions.

1. We have seen on the NVAO site that your program is one of the programs that has obtained the 'distinctive quality feature for internationalization'. Why did you decide to pursue this "extra" certification?
    a. Why wasn't the regular accreditation enough?
    b. Who was the main initiator for the certificate?

2. What were you hoping to obtain from this certificate?

3. What do you see as the main benefits of having the certificate?

4. What are some costs or disadvantages attached to the certificate?

5. Did the certification process (including preparation) had an impact on your program?

6. How was the process of obtaining the certificate like?

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the internationalization certificate? Would you do it again? Would you recommend it to other programs?

8. According to you, what characterizes the programs that have the certificate versus those that don't?

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