Better internationalisation through private certification? An analysis of private voluntary regulation in the assessment of internationalisation in Dutch higher education

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An analysis of private voluntary regulation in the assessment of internationalisation in Dutch higher education

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ABSTRACT

(**NL**) De internationalisering van het hoger onderwijs is anno 2020 een onmiskenbaar feit. Nederlandse universiteiten en hogescholen doen er gretig aan mee. Bijna allemaal beschikken ze over een internationaal studenten- en medewerkersbestand, hebben ze internationale curricula en doen ze mee met internationaal onderzoek.

De opkomst van internationalisering leidt ook tot vraagstukken. Het probleem dat centraal staat in deze thesis is zo'n vraagstuk. Want, hoe meten we de kwaliteit van internationalisering? Private partijen bieden hier een oplossing. Zo heeft het Europees Consortium voor Accreditatie in Hoger Onderwijs (ECA) een framework om internationalisering in hoger onderwijs te testen op kwaliteit. Zodoende wordt de kwaliteit 'tastbaar'. De vraag die dan rijst is: bieden opleidingen/programma's met een ECA-accreditatie daadwerkelijk 'betere' internationalisering dan hun counterparts zonder een dergelijke accreditatie?

Aan de hand van NSE-data wordt de bovenstaande vraag bekeken. Scoren opleidingen met ECA-predicaat beter op internationalisering dan dezelfde opleidingen (bij andere instituties) zónder predicaat? Deze thesis wijst uit dat accreditatie inderdaad leidt tot een hogere score op internationalisering in de NSE. Dat impliceert dat private accreditatie (en daarmee private regulering) positieve effecten heeft op de kwaliteit van een bepaald 'product'.

(**EN**) The internationalisation of higher education is an undeniable fact and Dutch universities (of applied sciences) are most eager to participate. Almost all of them have an international student- and staff body and they participate in international research.

However, the rise of internationalisation also leads to issues. This thesis explores such an issue; how do we measure the quality of internationalisation? Private parties offer a solution here. For example, the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) has a framework to test internationalisation in higher education for quality. The question then is: do ECA-accredited programmes actually offer 'better' internationalisation than their counterparts without such accreditation?

Using NSE data, this question is examined. Do accredited programmes score better on internationalisation than the same programmes (at different institutions) without predicate? This thesis shows that accreditation does indeed lead to a higher score on internationalisation in the NSE. This implies that private accreditation (and therefore private regulation) has a positive effect on the quality of a particular 'product'.

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1. | Introduction

1.1. | *Introduction to the topic*

Voluntary regulation has gradually grown into a prominent form of regulation amongst private (businesses) and public (education) actors (Provost, 2012). Indeed, regulation through voluntary means has become more popular and has attracted attention of scholars – as its increasing presence matches the rise of the concept of ‘’governance’’ in both political science and public administration (Provost, 2012: 1). Adding to that, Potoski and Prakash (2005) mention firms joining so-called ‘green clubs’ as to enhance their positive brand reputation. This form of voluntary regulation – joining a private program (or club) – generates interesting benefits for actors. As such, private programs that provide benefits such as a positive brand name have been adopted by many. The same goes for so-called ‘certification schemes’ – which are comparable to the programs mentioned by Potoski and Prakash (2005).

The topic of (private) voluntary regulation has been broadly researched by scholars in various fields. As also mentioned by Provost (2012) in his chapter on voluntary regulation, environmental regulatory governance has been a popular topic of research by scholars. For example, he stresses the existence of certain ‘standard-setting bodies’; private actors that literally set the standard for members to follow (Provost, 2012: 2). A prominent example of such a body is the International Organization for Standardization (or ISO), a non-governmental organization comprised of private, domestic standard-setting bodies which in turn are comprised of industry officials and experts. The ISO releases standards, with ISO14001 being one of the most adopted and studied (Prakash and Potoski, 2006), and if firms want to join they must comply to these standards. On top of ISO, other standard-setting bodies and private certifications schemes have been used and studied globally, in various business sectors.

While – as stated above – the use in private sectors has been researched quite extensively, less is known about the application of private standard-setting bodies in the public and semi-public sector. This does not mean that they are not present in these sectors; the use of private certifications as an indication of high quality is becoming more common among public actors such as universities. When reflecting on the Dutch situation, examples such as the Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organization (NVAO) and the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) can be mentioned. Both organizations facilitate methodologies to test and accredit higher education on various aspects, such as

internationalisation. ECA has developed an internationalisation platform that makes the quality of internationalisation 'tangible' (ECA, 2020). Their program enables institutions to either self-assess internationalisation or have their internationalisation evaluated by a quality assurance agency (ECA, 2020).

Internationalisation in higher education has become more and more visible over the past years, finding its way to government agendas within Europe (De Wit, 2010). Dutch universities and other higher education institutions are faced with the complexity of internationalisation – as it is increasing in both importance and scope (ECA, 2020). As such, higher education institutions are actively pursuing internationalisation of their curriculum and expanding cross-border education both within the EU and outside. To keep up with this trend, universities and other higher education institutions seek quality assurance through private certification bodies such as ECA and NVAO. The assessment of internationalisation will be touched upon more thoroughly later on in this thesis.

This research paper will dive into the topic of private voluntary regulation in the form of certification schemes on internationalisation.

1.2. | *Problem definition and research questions*

Over the past 25 years, governments and higher education institutions have been occupied with the phenomenon of internationalisation. Through adapting their curricula and engaging in cross-border exchanges of students, staff and knowledge (De Wit, 2010), universities have attempted to become more international. To assure the quality of their internationalisation and to accredit them for it, universities turn to private certification bodies such as the ECA. The question is then, what makes them do that? Why do higher education programs join voluntary certification programs? And, more interesting even, what is the effect? Does voluntary regulation work – do we see an actual link between internationalisation certificates and concrete internationalisation? This paper aims to study the latter.

Through the research question: ''To what extent does the perceived internationalisation quality of higher education programs coincide with internationalisation certification of the ECA?'', this paper will look at the effects of private certification on actual internationalisation.

To reach an answer on this question, a few sub-questions will be answered:

1. Are programmes that have obtained CeQuint-certification rated better *on internationalisation* than comparable and other programmes, at other institutions, that have not been accredited?
2. Are programmes that have obtained CeQuint-certification rated better *in general* than comparable and other programmes, at other institutions, that have not been accredited?
3. Do programmes with a clear international aim (international business, European studies) score better on internationalisation than programmes without such a clear aim?
4. Do programmes with a clear international aim (international business, European studies) score better on internationalisation than programmes without such a clear aim?

1.3. | *Research purpose and academic relevance*

Purpose

This research aims to find out if the certification of internationalisation by private certification bodies, leads to actual (better) internationalisation. As such, it analyses the effect of the CeQuint-certification on university programs. The paper will try to provide a clearer image of the use and effects of private voluntary certifications in the (semi-)public sector. The larger, overall question behind this research is how voluntary regulation in the (semi-)public sectors works and whether it is beneficial for the actors who privately regulate themselves or not.

Academic relevance

As mentioned in the introduction above, voluntary regulation is much researched in private sectors and less so in public sectors. This research is specifically aimed at the (semi-)public sector of higher education. In researching this sector, the research paper adds to observing voluntary regulation in a less-researched field. Researching whether and how voluntary regulation (through certification schemes) works in the semi-public sector will contribute to insights on whether private regulation is beneficial.

The results of this research carried out on the effect of voluntary regulation in higher education are relevant for the government and public actors. If a better understanding of this topic is achieved, it might be interesting to look into other possibilities with voluntary regulation. It is also interesting for higher education institutions to see whether they can benefit from private regulation – e.g., by their ratings amongst students increasing. Lastly, it is

also interesting for private regulators; if their product works and is successful, they can start offering more products.

1.4. | *Paper outline*

This research paper is divided into seven chapters. First of all, the concept of internationalisation in higher education will be touched upon. This second chapter will provide more insight in the evolution of the concept and why it is so high on government and higher education institutions' agendas right now. After that, the third chapter will discuss (private) voluntary regulation, providing a background on this alternative to classic government regulation. By using theories, a better understanding of voluntary regulation can be accomplished. On top of that, this third chapter will provide the hypotheses for this research. The next chapter will explain the used methodology and research design while the fifth chapter shares the findings of this research. In the sixth chapter, the implications, limitations and suggestions for further research are shared. Lastly, in the conclusion, the findings will be related to the research question.

2. | Internationalisation in Dutch Higher Education

Internationalisation in higher education is a product of the larger whole of globalization (Onderwijsraad, 2016). Indeed, in an ever-narrowing world in which people are easily and rapidly connected through travel, migration and internet, internationalisation of education seems a logic consequence. But even before modern technologies, there were international aspects to higher education. Defining internationalisation within higher education is difficult, as De Wit (2010) mentions, because it is an especially broad concept. He states that many different terms have been used to define internationalisation of higher education. Most of these terms have been curriculum related – and as such only used for studies like international studies or exchange programs. In searching a definition of what is meant by internationalisation, De Wit (2010: 8) cites Jane Knight in defining internationalisation as ‘’an intentional process of integrating an international and cultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution’’. He later adds that this process functions with the purpose ‘to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society’ (De Wit and Hunter, 2015).

This chapter will explore the concept of internationalisation in higher education. It will take a closer look at the history and development of internationalisation, after which the Dutch situation will be zoomed in upon. It will also describe the motivations and reasons for higher education institutions to embrace (or actively pursue) internationalisation. Lastly, the chapter will see how the quality of internationalisation is assessed and guaranteed in The Netherlands and whether the Dutch government has a role or not.

2.1. | *The development of internationalisation of higher education*

The Onderwijsraad (2016) tracks internationalisation in higher education back to academics like Desiderius Erasmus traveling across Europe in 1495. While not directly comparable to current day internationalisation of higher education, it makes sense that such travelling scholars laid a certain foundation for internationalisation as the international exchange of (academic) knowledge.

A clearer (and less extensive) time-path is offered by De Wit (2010) in his paper on internationalisation of higher education. He describes how the international dimension of higher education has become more prominent over the past 25 years (De Wit, 2010: 5). Since then, the issue has become central on the agenda of (European and national) governments,

higher education institutions and also accreditation agencies. Before, in the early days of European academic life, universities had been meeting grounds for international scholars already (De Wit, 2010). This resurged in the 20th century. Indeed, European programmes stimulating cooperation and exchange in higher education sprouted in the 1980s, giving way to internationalisation (De Wit, 2010). In his article on the debate on internationalisation, Teichler (2004) mentions that universities had long been very international institutions. He describes how it was desirable for higher education institutions to gather information from across the world and to enable innovation on a world scale (Teichler, 2004: 8). On top of that, most academics already held (and still hold) a more cosmopolitan set of values. This is further affirmed by Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009), who note that universities had always been affected by international trends. They argue that universities, to a certain degree, have been part of a broad, international community of academic institutions and scholars (Altbach et al., 2009). However, in the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s, projects that practically entailed internationalisation were never classified as being such – often being unrelated, isolated and relatively small in size (De Wit, 2011; Teichler, 2004).

As mentioned, this changed through new European attention for the issue. European universities started programs for cooperation in their education and academic research (De Wit, 2010). Over the past 25 to 30 years, these European programs have been the motor for a larger and more strategic approach to internationalisation in European higher education. At the same time, there is no 'one size that fits all' (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). There is a constant variation and evolution in regional and national differences between and within institutions. On top of that, said internationalisation does not merely involve cross-border movement of students and academics, De Wit (2010) also mentions so-called 'internationalisation at home'. This is a process in which national universities adapt their curriculum, staff body and standards to become more international. As such, universities offer more international programs and hire foreign scholars to teach and research (De Wit, 2010). Both internationalisation at home and internationalisation abroad have become more prominent and visible over the years (De Wit, 2010). While the focus for one – internationalisation at home – is on curriculum and standards and the other – internationalisation abroad – on mobility, the two are intertwined rather than exclusive (De Wit, 2010).

Nowadays, internationalisation is becoming mainstreamed at both the national and institutional level in most European countries (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). There is an

increased awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive by not aiming principally on mobility, but on curriculum and learning outcomes as well – re-emphasizing that internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance quality (De Wit and Hunter, 2015: 29). Generally, both countries and institutions are taking on a more proactive approach in broadening the scope of their international activities. De Wit and Hunter (2015) mention that universities tend to develop a more strategic approach to internationalisation. These differences across institutions will be discussed later.

2.2. | *Motivations for internationalisation of higher education*

As stated above, the international activities of universities substantively expanded in volume and scope over the past two decades. But what is the drive behind these activities? The motivations for internationalisation are varying and do not halt at institutions of higher education alone. Governments and industry also have their motivations to get involved in international educational activities (De Wit, 1999). De Wit (1999) and Altbach and Knight (2007) generally distinguish four 'categories' of motivation. First (and most foremost) political motivations and economic motivations, but also academic and (socio-)cultural motivations (De Wit, 1999, Altbach and Knight, 2007). These rationales for internationalisation have radically shifted over time.

The classic – medieval even – idea of internationalisation is that it is motivated academically and culturally. De Wit (1999) illustrates the 'wandering scholar' who is looking to enlighten himself through understanding other cultures and different knowledge. Indeed, academic motivations for internationalisation are improving learning, researching and teaching through learning from others. At the same time, cultural motivations for internationalisation include generating awareness of other cultures and differences between them. As such, scholars become global citizens (De Wit, 2011).

Global citizenry is not the idea behind politically motivated internationalisation. Instead, De Wit (1999) argues, the idea was maintaining and expanding national influence through knowledge of other cultures, languages and systems. After the Cold War, this rationale has become less dominant but it is still present.

Altbach and Knight (2007: 291) emphasize the importance of a free-trade context in rationales behind internationalisation. They argue that the thinking on international higher education is that of a commodity to be freely traded and thus of higher education as a private good (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Ergo, earning money and making profit are key motivations for

internationalisation – especially for universities with financial problems. De Wit (1999) adds that economic rationales were and are still driving European programs for cooperation and exchange in higher education. He states that economic factors are the dominant motivation for internationalisation (De Wit, 1999), which is backed by De Wit and Hunter (2015: 43). Preparing students for the global labour market, attracting international talent for the knowledge economy and making profit have become pillars of the internationalisation of the past decade (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). Qiang (2003) adds that international higher education will ensure economic competitiveness and is thus pursued by both governments and institutions.

While the economic rationale seems prevalent, De Wit and Hunter (2015) stress that internationalisation is never purely economically driven. European higher education institutions attach great importance to cooperation. Generally, internationalisation is often driven by a combination of motivations.

2.3. | *Differences in internationalisation across European higher education institutions*

Not only did internationalisation become mainstream, it also saw changes to its focus, scope and content – which evolved substantially over the years (De Wit, 2011: 242). Traditionally, internationalisation entails sending students to study abroad (foreign exchange) or engaging in intern-institutional partnerships (Altbach et al., 2009: 2). It has since then moved from being a more reactive to a pro-active strategic issue. De Wit (2010: 5) notes that nowadays, internationalisation is more competitive and commercial than it initially was. Still, European universities appear to pursue a more cooperative and traditional approach to internationalisation – working together more than competing with one another (De Wit, 2010). De Wit (2010: 5) also mentions that internationalisation is not developing in the same way and pace across universities, but that through Europe and globally, universities are placing their own accents and approaches. These accents are determined by the environment in which a university operates. They are rooted within university (and programme) culture, national and international policies and also opportunities (De Wit, 2010). As such, an internationalisation strategy for one programme (for example HBO verpleegkunde in The Netherlands) can be entirely different for another programme.

The three largest European countries – France, Germany and the United Kingdom – are quantitatively the most dominant in the internationalisation of higher education (De Wit and Hunter, 2015: 37). They have the largest number of students they host and the largest cross-

border delivery of education. In other areas however, these three are significantly less dominant. De Wit and Hunter (2015) identify both exchange and curriculum development as less significant for the big three. On top of that, looking beyond these three, substantive regional differences can be identified. In terms of higher education system structures and cultures, as well as internationalisation, there are differences between Northern Europe, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe (De Wit and Hunter, 2015: 37).

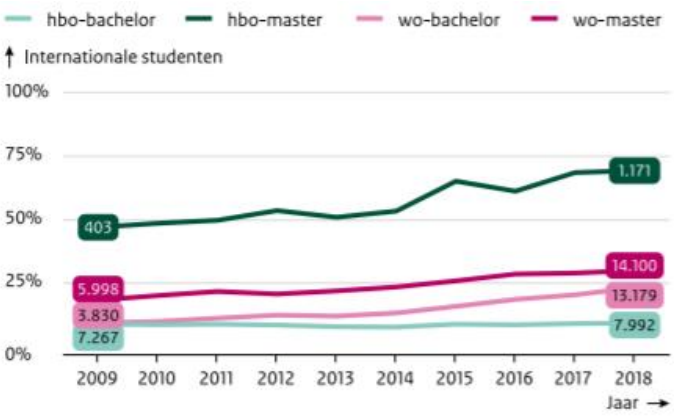
The various European Union initiatives on internationalisation have stimulated national governments and institutions to develop their own strategies. Although the EU-effort has been aimed at reaching more coherent and similar internationalisation strategies across the member states, there are still substantial differences in both rationales and strategies between institutions (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). Implementing a strategic approach in developing an international dimension puts universities before a challenge – especially in the competitive and uncertain environment in which these institutions have to operate (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). Internationalisation has become an inevitable choice for most, which results in internationalisation strategies being introduced on a 'trial-and-error basis' (De Wit and Hunter, 2015: 57). It is noted by Nolan and Hunter (2012) that successful internationalisation can be reached in varying, particular ways, while failed internationalisation is often done in similar ways.

Most European strategies are still mainly focused on mobility, economic gains (short- and long term) and international reputation (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). The next paragraph will reflect on the Dutch situation to see how this works out in an individual case.

2.4. | *Internationalisation of Dutch higher education institutions*

When reflecting upon the Dutch situation, almost all universities and universities of applied sciences have an international student body, offer an international curriculum and foreign exchange programs (Vereniging Hogescholen & VSNU, 2014). The number of international students is increasing and a large part of the Dutch higher education is done in English – as to accommodate international students. The Dutch Education inspection signals that 1 out of 5 starting university bachelor-students are international, with the number of international students starting an HBO- (or university of applied sciences) bachelor being lower (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2017).

European developments and policies have irrefutably exerted large influence over the internationalisation of Dutch higher education (De Wit and Hunter, 2015: 127). Programs such as ERASMUS have triggered a growing wave of student mobility since they were implemented. At the same time, the Netherlands is also a popular destination for European neighbours. In 2013, forty-three percent of all international students were German (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). As such, for German students, the Netherlands was a more popular destination than other German-speaking countries (such as Austria). And while the largest part of the international student population is still either German, Belgian or Chinese, it is slowly changing to be a more diverse student body with students from across the whole world (De Wit and Hunter, 2015).



2.1 | The number of international students has been increasing for the past ten years. There is a clear difference in the number of international hbo-students and wo-students (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2020).

At the same time, internationalisation has caught the attention of the Dutch government. De Wit and Hunter (2015: 128) mention the importance of advisory reports from the Onderwijsraad, CPB and the SER on the policies of the Dutch Ministry of Education, in terms of their influence on said policies. From 2005 on, the Dutch government has been involved in developing policy on internationalisation. Various administrations have paid attention to the issue, seeing to the reduction of regulatory obstacles to enable internationalisation. Simultaneously, consecutive governments have been focusing on the economic gains (to both taxpayer and economy) and how internationalisation can be beneficial for the Netherlands (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). But a growing international student body also means pressure on higher education. The national student body can experience exclusion from certain programmes because of high international demand (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2019: 44-45). Recently, the Dutch Ministry of Education has announced policy to help regulate the influx of international students (Rijksoverheid, 2020). As such, it is constantly looking to achieve a delicate balance in internationalisation.

De Wit and Hunter (2015: 127) mention how European programmes on internationalisation have exerted a substantial influence on Dutch higher education institutions. Still – despite

high quality and the availability of English language instruction – the Netherlands takes a middle place on the European range. Various general inefficiencies at multiple levels are the reason for this position; among other things staff mobility and international credit mobility (De Wit and Hunter, 2015).

2.5. | *Assessment and quality of internationalisation*

Internationalisation has taken quite a flight over the past decades, as more and more higher education institutions have 'internationalized'. But with growing internationalisation comes the question as to how we measure what we do (EAIE, 2009). The call for accountability by students, university staff and management – as well as the call for quality assurance – has become a prominent issue in the internationalisation process.

Some questions that are relevant in addressing the issue of assessment are:

- How do we measure what we do?
- What do we measure?
- What indicators do we use for assessment?
- Do we assess processes or activities?
- Do we carry out assessments with a view to improving the quality of our own process and activities or do we assess the contribution made by internationalisation to the improvement of the overall quality of higher education?
- Do we use a quantitative and/or a qualitative approach to measurement?
- Which instruments do we use, *ex post* or *ex ante* measurements, indicators, benchmarking, best practices, quality review, accreditation, certification, audits or rankings?
- Are we focussing on inputs, outputs or outcomes?

2.2 | Relevant questions for the assessment of internationalisation (EAIE, 2009: 3)

Internationalisation, although developed through an increased emphasis on economic rationales, is not developing in the same ways globally (EAIE, 2009). The lack of one model for internationalisation makes measuring and assessing internationalisation complex. As such, when evaluating internationalisation, the combination of motivations, approaches, objectives and strategies have to be taken into account (EAIE, 2009). On top of that, region, country and institution also have to be born in mind.

In their contribution to the European Association for International Education paper 'Measuring success in the internationalisation of higher education', Hudzik and Stohl (EAIE, 2009) look at various levels of assessment of internationalisation. These authors stress the importance of the mission and priorities of higher education institutions (EAIE, 2009). In the table below, they have identified the core institutional functions and linked input, output and outcome indicators. As such, they suggest that universities are to be assessed with regard to their core institutional function and consequent indicators (EAIE, 2009).

The international ranking of universities is a relatively recent example of how the measurement of higher education success has changed through the years (EAIE, 2009). The problem with ranking however, is that it is surrounded with clouds of uncertainty. While

ranking should be clear and unambiguous, there are examples of confusion in international rankings; often caused by different interpretations of variables (EAIE, 2009: 41). To effectively measure internationalisation, a comprehensive set of indicators should be developed.

Core institutional function	**Sample input indicators**	**Sample output indicators**	**Sample outcome indicators**
Discovery	Institutional research expenditure per faculty member in support of international, global or comparative research. Or external research dollar for…, etc.	Publications, patents, incidence of citation, grants and contracts from external sources from international activity.	Enhanced institutional reputation, awards, commercial applications, income, economic development of communities or regions, community problem solving, etc.
Learning	Number and diversity of options to study abroad; extent of on-campus curriculum that incorporates global, comparative or international content; institutional financial support for such courses or study; number of faculty with relevant expertise.	Number and diversity of students studying abroad, enrolments in courses with global, comparative or international content, curricular integration of international content, number of faculty delivering this content	Impacts on student learning, knowledge acquisition, attitudes, beliefs, life skills, careers, etc.
Engagement	Funds, people and other resources applied to community or international development problem-solving and engagement	Number of projects, locations and people abroad involved. Problem-solving domestically that incorporates methods and learning from other societies and cultures	Impacts on people's well-being and condition – economic, health, income, nutrition, safety and security, access, etc.

2.3 | Dimensions for the assessment of internationalisation (EAIE, 2009)

Market-based instruments of quality assurance accreditation have surged to popularity, as many universities apply for quality accreditation to comply to the demands of high-quality education (Dill and Beerkens, 2012). This follows the so-called ''massification'' (shifting away from elite system of higher education) and internationalisation of higher education and the consequent failure of education ministries to cope (Dill and Beerkens, 2012). Hence, many institutions have sought increased flexibility and autonomy from traditional state quality assurance to react more rapidly to changing social demands (Dill, 2007). Market-based

quality assurance accreditation entails the monitoring of quality through independent market parties, instead of public or semi-public organisations. If looked at the Dutch context, actors such as the NVAO (a Dutch-Flemish accreditation organisation) and the ECA (the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education) are active in this field. While these actors are not necessarily independent – as the NVAO also conducts mandatory governmental accreditations for higher education programmes – they uniquely experiment with alternative, more market-oriented measures, such as certification for internationalisation (ECA, 2020).

2.6. | *Private certification in internationalisation*

This unique experiment with market-based projects is clearly visible in the field of internationalisation. Both the NVAO and the ECA issue so-called certifications for the quality of internationalisation. This entails that these private organisations assess the quality of internationalisation at universities and HBO's and issues certificates for that quality.

In 2009, the NVAO developed a framework for the assessment of internationalisation quality (NVAO, 2020). Initially, this project aimed to measure said quality on a programme-level, which later extended to assessments on institutional level. If the framework is passed, the NVAO awards a programme or institutions with the so-called ''bijzonder kenmerk internationalisering''. In 2012, ECA – in cooperation with NVAO – took over this assessment method and started using it in an international context. As such, it could be used for other countries outside of The Netherlands as well (NVAO, 2020). The ECA certificate was called Certificate for Quality in International – or CeQuint – which is awarded after a successful assessment of internationalisation quality.

2.4 | The CeQuint web certificate, which can be used on a programme or institution website after successful assessment

This assessment follows a framework that was originally drawn up by the NVAO and then copied – albeit slightly altered – by the ECA for European (and international) assessment. The framework methodology[1] used tests for various criteria, such as internationalisation goals and progress, teaching methods and student experience. These criteria are divided in a total of five standards (ECA, 2020). An assessment is given for each standard, on a scale ranging from unsatisfactory to excellent. To be accredited, a programme or institutions needs to achieve at

[1] The document outlining the framework methodology can be reviewed at http://ecahe.eu/home/internationalisation-platform/certification/relevant-documents/

least a ‘good’ on three of the standards, and none of the standards may be ranked as ‘unsatisfactory’.

If programmes or institutions are then accredited, they are given a certificate. An overview of accredited programmes and institutions can be found in the ECA internationalisation platform database (ECA, 2020). Until now, around 50 programmes and institutions have been accredited by the ECA, with nine of them in 2020[2]. If the overview is looked at, accreditation mostly happens on a programme-level instead of an institutional level. Another interesting thing to note is that ECA, although it is intended for international and European universities, mostly accredits Dutch institutions and programmes.

This paper will look closer at the concept of private certification and quality assurance in the theoretical framework next.

[2] Accredited programmes and institutions can be found in the ECA register here: http://ecahe.eu/home/internationalisation-platform/

3. | Theoretical framework

The last chapter explored the concept of internationalisation within higher education and looked at its development, the rationales behind it and the practice of internationalisation in The Netherlands. It also introduced the concept of market-based quality assurance in higher education. This concept, together with so-called private voluntary regulation, will be the key focus of the following chapter. The development and use of private voluntary regulation schemes will be discussed, together with the motivations for governments and universities to work with such private voluntary regulation. The chapter will end with the research hypotheses drawn from said theory.

3.1. | *Classic regulation, self-regulation and private regulation*

States approach gaining control over externalities in various ways. They might regulate directly, through government departments or agencies (e.g., limiting speed through the Ministry of Infrastructure). States can also rely on self-regulation, when individuals and organizations exert control over their own behaviour – sometimes constrained governmentally (Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2011). Another option is so-called private regulation, in which the regulation of individuals and organizations becomes market-based.

Government (or classic) regulation – Baldwin et al. (2011) refer to this as ‘’command-and-control’’ regulation – is an approach in which a government sets the rules. Such imposed standards are backed by sanctions and thus with legal consequences in case of non-compliance. The threat of being sanctioned is used to prohibit unwanted forms of conduct or to demand positive actions (Baldwin et al., 2011). This possibility is the strength of classic regulation, as governments can outlaw harmful and ill-qualified practices. It has some weaknesses as well. Relationships between the regulators and the regulated might become too close, leading the regulator to lose eye for the general public in its dealing with the interests of the regulated (Baldwin et al., 2011). Furthermore, classic regulation is alleged to produce unnecessarily complex and inflexible rules (over-regulation). On top of that, through the challenge of setting standards that successfully apply to all (over-inclusivity), regulators tend to produce very generalized standards that might be difficult to comply to (Baldwin et al., 2011).

Because of the limitations of classic regulation, other approaches to regulation have grown in popularity. Self-regulation (or voluntary regulation) is one of the alternatives. It entails giving regulatory power to the regulated organisations themselves, or to other non-governmental

parties, thereby no longer depending on governmental parties (Baldwin et al., 2011). This can be non-state organizations such as trade associations, but also consumers or corporations (Baldwin et al., 2011). Self-regulation solves the problem of generalized standards, as the regulators are better aware of what is reasonable for their environment. As such, said environment can easier comply to the set standards (Baldwin et al., 2011). Self-regulation is often supervised by governments, that can help the supervising bodies by enforcing rules or transferring legal force to the self-regulator. It is considered to be more expertise-based and more efficient, as practitioners know more about their field than bureaucrats and have easier access to this field (Baldwin et al., 2011).

Globalization (among other things) fuelled the need for new regulation strategies (Locke, 2013). As businesses and organisations are no longer limited by country borders and thus by country regulations, new forms of regulation had to be developed. This resulted in the establishment of private initiatives to articulate standards globally, as to influence corporate and individual behaviour (Locke, 2013). So-called private (or market) regulation comes in various forms; it can be companies like Apple forcing their suppliers to sign a code of conduct

Professional (self) regulation	Market regulation	State (direct) regulation
External Examining (UK)	*CHE-Ranking (Germany)*	*National Qualifications Framework (Australia)*
Teacher Education Accreditation Council (USA)	*National Survey of Student Engagement (USA)*	*Subject Benchmarking (UK)*
		Subject Assessments (Denmark)
		Subject Accreditation (Germany)
		General Medical Council Accreditation (UK)
		Academic Audit (Hong Kong)
		Performance-based contracting (Catalonia, Spain)
		National Report Card on Higher Education (USA)
	Course Experience Questionnaire and Graduate Destination Survey (Australia)	
	National Assessment of Courses (Brazil)	

3.1 | New Public Policy Instruments for the Assurance of Academic Quality (Dill and Beerkens, 2012: 343)

as to enforce proper working conditions, private auditing companies inspecting factories or the labelling of products – as seen with the ‘’fair trade’’-logo (Locke, 2013).

When reflecting upon higher education institutions, private regulation promotes competition between universities to achieve quality (Dill and Beerkens, 2012). Examples are the global rankings of higher education institutions, and other information guides. Students will choose universities who score high on these rankings and, as such, they are incentives to ensure academic quality (Dill and Beerkens, 2012).

3.2. | *Governance and private voluntary regulation*

The regulation of individuals and organisations through voluntary means has attracted significant attention from scholars over the past years (Provost, 2012). This method of regulation has become prevalent, with prominent examples in environmental and business regulation. Provost (2012) argues that governments are faced with potential collective action problems when regulating businesses and organisations. According to Provost (2012), an optimal outcome to such issues is cooperation between the regulator and the regulated.

3.2.1 | *Rationales behind voluntary regulation*

Why do organisations volunteer to regulate themselves? Would evasion or non-compliance not be more rational? Voluntary regulation has shown the potential to overcome collective action problems, but it is important to understand why governments and organisations seek self-regulatory arrangements.

Most of all, governments are inclined to move towards voluntary regulation because it can reduce transaction costs. This is especially attractive for complex policy fields such as the environment or health. In such fields, actors often have far more knowledge of their own activities than government bureaucrats do – which creates information asymmetry between regulator and regulated (Provost, 2012). If organisations were to exploit this asymmetry, it would mean more costs spent on monitoring the behaviour of the regulated. Self-regulatory programs can create effective, cost-saving regulatory governance for both parties involved. At the same time, in order for private regulation to work properly, organisations that want to self-regulate must fully commit to it (no free-riding) and governments must consider how their regulations can be aligned with business self-regulation (Provost, 2012).

An important and often-mentioned example of voluntary regulation is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), an NGO that deals with international standardization – of which many standards have been widely adopted (Provost, 2012; Prakash and Potoski, 2006). If firms desire to join one of the ISO standards, they must demonstrate a serious motivation to improve their processes (Prakash and Potoski, 2006). On top of that, joining and ISO-standard involves being placed under scrutiny of an independent (third-party) auditor, that keeps check of compliance to standard rules (Provost, 2012).

Provost (2012) mentions how ISO (14001) meets the theoretical criteria necessary to have a successful voluntary regulatory program. First of all, it succeeds in imposing significant costs on aspiring member firms through the certification procedure, thus ensuring that only

motivated firms join. Members are therefore 'actually committed to maintaining meaningful environmental management systems' (Provost, 2012). On top of that, ISO employs an external auditing and verification system, which ensures that no member can neglect its responsibilities under the ISO-standard. Lastly, as argued by Prakash (2000), ISO is able to attract firms by the thousands because of its status as a global legitimate standard-setting body. Such a feature also has the potential to reduce costs like trade barriers, since standards have already been harmonized (Prakash, 2000). It can thus be concluded that certification can be successful if actors adopt all of the requirements set in the framework, leading to beneficial results for both them and their environment. They are likely to do so because they were motivated to join and because neglecting responsibilities will be disadvantageous.

3.3. | *External quality assurance of the internationalisation of higher education*

In his article, Van Damme (2001) signals that internationalisation in higher education has developed without much concern for quality – thus resulting in a quality challenge. Indeed, the issue of quality assurance in higher education became a more prominent topic in policy discourse only recently (Hauptman Komotar, 2018). The relationship between internationalisation in higher education and quality assurance have been analysed by various authors, as Hauptman Komotar (2018: 3) mentions, and she goes on to define a core concept. Quality assurance of internationalisation relates to quality assurance as a means to improve internationalisation policies and activities. Beerkens (2015) discusses the purpose of quality assurance. She mentions the classic dichotomy between quality enhancement and accountability as the main purposes of quality assurance (2015). With the growth of internationalisation in higher education came an interest in assessing and assuring its quality and, as such, the need for quality assurance programs grew (Hauptman Komotar, 2018). Efforts like the Internationalisation Quality Review Process were launched to fill in this need. However, such programs were mainly implemented at an institutional level instead of a government level of 'practice and policy' (Hauptman Komotar, 2018).

This improved in the last decade, with more initiatives sprouting. The NVAO-model for quality assurance of internationalisation in higher education is an example of such an initiative. As Hauptman Komotar explains, the NVAO was one of the first to create a methodology for assessing internationalisation in higher education (2018: 4). The ECA took over this methodology for quality assurance outside of The Netherlands, allowing for European and international universities to be accredited as well (NVAO, 2020). It tests internationalisation in higher education by five standards and, in case of a successful

evaluation, awards a ‘Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation’ (Hauptman Komotar, 2018). It fits the notion of Beerkens (2018) who states that the field of quality assurance has evolved significantly over the past decades. She quotes Stensaker in saying that an era of realism in quality assurance has commenced (2018: 272).

As internationalisation took a flight in The Netherlands, instruments for assessing said internationalisation were requested. Such instruments were introduced in the early ‘90s, for example by Nuffic – the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (Hauptman Komotar, 2018: 11). Nuffic presented guidelines to assess internationalisation quality in higher education, which were used on a voluntary basis for self-evaluation. Hauptman Komotar argues that this signalled the beginning of collaboration between organisations for internationalisation and authorities responsible for quality insurance (2018: 11).

In more recent years, the Dutch higher education system saw other tools for quality measuring introduced. For example, NVAO launched a framework for assessing the stage of development of internationalisation, making it possible for institutions to obtain a so-called ‘distinctive quality feature for internationalisation’ (Hauptman Komotar, 2018). The ECA launched a similar but more specific assessment tool in 2016, awarding the (above mentioned) European Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation for qualitatively good internationalised higher education programmes (Aerden, 2015). Both frameworks thus use so-called ‘private voluntary certification schemes’ as a mechanism to verify a certain set of standards to test the quality of internationalisation.

3.4. | *The use of certification schemes in higher education quality assurance*

Certifications for quality assurance are used globally and for a wide range of things, such as the quality of certain foods (Fair trade, ‘Ik kies bewust’-checks) and – as said – the quality of education. Consumers, such as students in the higher education example, are shown to prefer certified products, as they see this certification as a warrant of quality. As argued by the National Research Council (2010), certification standards are a response to consumer expectations about products. It also argues that certification has enjoyed most success in sectors with large-volume producers and likewise large-scale consumers (NRC, 2010).

There is still confusion amongst scholars as to how certifications function. Some, like the NRC (2010), label certification schemes as a market-based mechanism. Joining in on such a mechanism is done to profit from the market advantages of certification. Indeed, as mentioned, consumers are likelier to buy certified products, therefore increasing demand for a

firm or organisation (NRC, 2010). At the same time, these organisations will want to keep innovating and increasing quality, as not to lose certification. Other authors, such as Overdevest (2010), stress the signalling mechanism of certification. Certification schemes function to assure consumers of good quality and compliance with regulations. As such, certified products can be expected to comply with high standards. Indeed, as Overdevest (2010) concludes, actors will have to fulfil high standards in order to be certified. This will result in them increasing their product quality in order to meet said standards and gain accreditation. In each case, private certifications are beneficial for both consumers (high quality, innovative product) and organisations (high demand).

3.5. | *Motivations for seeking (private) certification*

With private certifications being beneficial for both consumers and organisations, the rationales behind pursuing private certification are twofold. This paragraph recognizes economic motivations and intrinsic/extrinsic motivations.

This first category of rationales principally refers to the reduction of (transaction) costs, the possibility of higher demand and higher profit and image building by adopting certification. Pursuing certification becomes interesting when such certification attracts consumer demand. When reflecting this notion on universities, similar rationales can be discovered. (International) Students can be attracted through certification that guarantees the quality of internationalisation. Having more students means more money for higher education institutions – which appears to be a driving force in the economic rationale.

In their article on the motivations behind ISO14001, Gavronski, Ferrer and Paiva (2006: 91) distinguish four: reactive, internal, proactive and legal motivations. First of all, organisations might adopt certification when faced with external pressures from (e.g.) governments and society. Adopting private certification thus is a reaction to external pressure. Secondly, organisations might pursue certification to solve day-to-day functioning issues – so-called internal motivations (Gavronski et al., 2006). Through certification, firms try to solve internal problems (such as under-performance). When organisations fear or expect problems with externalities, they may adopt certification to shield them for said problems (Gavronski et al., 2006). Through a proactive approach, firms can avoid criticism and keep in control. Lastly, Gavronski et al. (2006) mention legal motivations. Firms and organisations can pre-sort on future regulations or comply to current regulations by pursuing certification. The authors

stress that these motivations do not exclude each other (Gavronski et al 2006: 88). As such, organisations can have multiple of these motivations for pursuing certification.

3.6. | *Hypotheses for the research*

There are various Dutch higher education institutions and programmes that have been accredited by the ECA. The question now is whether that 'theoretical' internationalisation – backed by the accreditation – coincides with the actual perceived internationalisation. But which programmes apply for said internationalisation? It would make sense that programmes that want to attract an international student body and that operate in an international context will want to achieve accreditation. To get accreditation for the quality of their internationalisation, institutions or specific programmes will have to deliver on that quality. This could entail making their program more international as to meet the requirements of the ECA. As such, preparation can be key to obtain certification. If such certification is obtained, do programs get higher internationalisation *and* general scores? And are other variables, such as the institutional level or the nature of the program, of importance too?

3.6.1. | Does CeQuint make the difference in internationalisation scores?

The main question in this research is whether CeQuint-accredited programmes score higher on internationalisation quality than their non-accredited peers. There are a few arguments to hypothesize why this is the case. If the literature is assessed, these arguments can be reinforced.

The rationale behind hypothesizing that CeQuint-certification leads to higher internationalisation scores is straightforward. Overdevest (2010) mentions the core idea behind this. Actors (such as higher education institutions) seek accreditation and therefore privately regulate themselves in order to gain the benefits from such accreditation (Overdevest, 2010; NRC, 2010). In order to gain certification, the applicant needs to meet the demands set by a private regulator. These demands often require hard guarantees on quality and purpose – such as a clear internationalisation goal and high student satisfaction with the CeQuint-certification (ECA, 2020). Overdevest argues that this will result in a quality (or effort) increase, because actors will actively pursue meeting the demands for accreditation (2010). In the case of CeQuint, institutions that apply for certification will have to meet the demands set by the ECA. By complying to these standards, programmes increase the quality of their internationalisation (or maintain already achieved standards). Higher quality should

be perceived by students, which will then result in a higher internationalisation score – as hypothesized. As also mentioned by various scholars (e.g., Gavronski et al, 2006), institutions have clear motivations for obtaining accreditation. This motivation will translate into efforts in obtaining CeQuint-certification, but also in efforts in maintaining said accreditation. Programmes can be expected to keep up programme-quality to hold onto accreditation. This will then also mean a higher score on internationalisation, as programmes are expected to continue meeting accreditation demands, resulting in a more structural quality of internationalisation.

Secondly, internationalisation is popular and this research has already explored the rationales behind that popularity. But on top of internationalisation and attracting international students, some institutions offer international programmes that have a curriculum aimed specifically on international topics. Examples of such programmes are international business, European studies but also international studies. These can be vetted against programmes without a specific international aim such as physiotherapy or facility management. The question is, do programmes with an 'international aim' score higher on internationalisation than those who do not have such an aim? Both categories can have an international student body, teach courses in English and hire international staff – but does an international curriculum make the difference?

It seems likely that it does. The international aim of a programme – translated in instruction language and curriculum – can account for a part of the internationalisation score. The first step towards international education often is adopting an international teaching language. Furthermore, as mentioned by De Wit (2009), clear international orientation leads to a clearer international component in programme-curricula – which means that students are confronted more clearly with internationalisation in their education. They will perceive their programme to be more international – with an international focus in courses, staff and student body – and therefore it can be expected that they rate their programme higher on internationalisation. On top of that, an international aim can be the first step in a process of achieving accreditation.

H1: Programmes with CeQuint-certification get higher internationalisation scores than *non-accredited* programmes because they have met the stringent demands of high quality to be ECA-accredited
H2: Programmes with CeQuint-certification get higher internationalisation scores than *non-accredited comparable programmes* because they have met the stringent demands of high quality to be ECA-accredited

3.6.2. | Does CeQuint make the difference in general scores?

The same reasoning as under 4.1.1 applies here; if institutions or programmes, for economical or financial reasons, seek accreditation, their internationalisation score will improve. This is a result of (1) efforts in improving to meet accreditation demands and (2) efforts in holding on to that accreditation by monitoring programme quality. Internationalisation is one of the components in a general score. If that specific component improves, the general score of a programme will most likely improve as well. This is relevant, because it generates information on whether private regulation in higher education solely influences the aspect it is aiming for (internationalisation) or the overall quality (as measured in general score).

H3: Programmes with CeQuint-certification get higher general scores because the improvement of the internationalisation score will add up to a higher general score

3.6.3. | Are universities more international than HBO-institutions?

In the chapter on internationalisation, it was mentioned that the VSNU and Vereniging Hogescholen (2014) and the Onderwijsinspectie (2017) signalled a significant increase in internationalisation in Dutch higher education over the past decade. De Wit and Hunter (2015) add to that by stating that the Dutch government has actively starting to promote internationalisation. While both the VSNU and the Vereniging Hogescholen signal a steady increase of internationalisation in Dutch higher education in general, universities are stated to have the largest international student body. The Onderwijsinspectie (2019) mentions that 1 on 5 university bachelor students are international, with 30 percent of the university master students being international. In HBO-bachelors, 9 percent of the total student body is international.

By looking at the institutional level, the research can discover whether this variable accounts for a difference in internationalisation score as well. Do universities score higher on internationalisation simply because they are a university – and therefore a more international and internationally experienced environment? It also allows for analysis of whether institutional level has a greater influence on internationalisation scores than CeQuint-certification, or the other way around.

Through a larger international student body, universities have more experience with internationalisation. Even with CeQuint-certification, this will probably lead to a higher score on internationalisation for universities – as these institutions are simply more internationally orientated and have a larger international student body.

H4: ECA-accredited universities score higher on internationalisation than accredited HBO-institutions because they have more experience with internationalisation

3.6.4. | Does an international 'aim' make any difference?

Internationalisation is popular and this research has already explored the rationales behind that popularity. But on top of internationalisation and attracting international students, some institutions offer international programmes that have a curriculum aimed specifically on international topics. Examples of such programmes are international business, European studies but also international studies. These can be vetted against programmes without a specific international aim such as physiotherapy or facility management. The question is, do programmes with an 'international aim' score higher on internationalisation than those who do not have such an aim? Both categories can have an international student body, teach courses in English and hire international staff – but does an international curriculum make the difference?

It seems likely that it does. The international aim of a programme – translated in instruction language and curriculum – can account for a part of the internationalisation score. The first step towards international education often is adopting an international teaching language. Furthermore, as mentioned by De Wit (2009), clear international orientation leads to a clearer international component in programme-curricula – which means that students are confronted more clearly with internationalisation in their education. They will perceive their programme

to be more international – with an international focus in courses, staff and student body – and therefore it can be expected that they rate their programme higher on internationalisation. On top of that, an international aim can be the first step in a process of achieving accreditation.

H5: Programmes with a clear international aim are rated higher on internationalisation than programmes without such an aim

This research seeks to answer a few questions in the light of the main research question; ‘’To what extent does the perceived internationalisation quality of higher education programs coincide with internationalisation certification of the ECA?’’ . To answer that question, a few sub-questions will be looked at:

1. Are programmes that have obtained CeQuint-certification rated better *on internationalisation* than the same programmes, at other institutions, that have not been accredited?
2. Are programmes that have obtained CeQuint-certification rated better *in general* than the same programmes, at other institutions, that have not been accredited?
3. Do HBO (university of applied sciences) programmes score better on internationalisation than university programmes? Or is it the other way around?
4. Do programmes with a clear international aim (international business, European studies) score better on internationalisation than programmes without such a clear aim?

The methodological framework that follows this chapter will provide a research design for analysing these questions.

4. | Methodological framework

The previous chapters reviewed literature and theories on the concepts of internationalization of higher education and private certification of internationalization. On top of that, various hypotheses were formulated to predict the outcomes of the research. This next chapter will take a closer look at the methodology used to find results to the research questions posed in this thesis. It will explore the research design that has been devised to research the significance of CeQuint-certification on internationalisation.

After briefly discussing the relevance and purpose of this research, this chapter will demonstrate the research approach, justification and data collection for this thesis.

4.1 | *Research goal*

As mentioned several times in this thesis, the purpose of this research is to find a relation between internationalisation (scores) and certification in higher education. This research will examine whether certification results in higher (perceived) quality of internationalisation and, thus, that it results in a higher internationalisation score for a programme.

4.2. | *Study design and sample*

To find a satisfying answer to the research questions and hypotheses posed, data is required for analysis. For the first variable, the CeQuint-certification, the list of all ECA-accredited institutions and programmes can be used. This overview shows the 'what, which, where and when' with regards to said accreditation. As such, it provides a summary of programmes that can be used in this research. Do these programmes experience an improvement in internationalisation after having obtained accreditation? This overview can be found on the ECA website – which was consulted for this purpose.

Secondly, for the internationalisation variable, a grade or score is necessary to measure the perceived quality. Internationalisation, among other things, is rated through the so-called 'Nationale Studenten Enquête'; a Dutch survey through which students can rate their university and their education (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2020). On top of giving a general score (0 to 5), students also rate specific issues such as internationalisation. The latter is useful for this research, as the quality of internationalisation is quantified through the NSE.

Using NSE data means that this research will test the hypotheses through the use of survey data. A survey is a large collection of data on large numbers of research units, which allows for an efficient and generalizable result. Thus, this research is quantitative of nature – estimating the statistically significant differences between CeQuint-certified and non-certified programmes. The NSE-dataset consists of 2366 individual university and HBO programmes, classified by their CROHO-numbers.

4.2.1. | Measuring internationalisation

The quality of internationalisation is reflected by the score given by students in the NSE. The NSE is a survey conducted by Studiekeuze123 – an independent foundation found and fully funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2020). This foundation has developed several tools for collecting and distributing information on study choice. It was a collective initiative of various higher education interest groups (such as the VSNU) to ensure an objective collection of data on higher education. The main goal is to provide soon-to-be students with a clear overview of information on study choice.

The NSE is one of the tools developed by Studiekeuze123 to provide such information. It is a nationwide survey that is conducted yearly, with the goal of generating current and reliable information on individual study programmes (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2020). The idea is that students rate their current education to make study choice easier for future generations. The response rate is usually quite high (see table 4.1), providing useful information on higher education.

Through questions on issues such as (for example) general satisfaction, internship possibilities, class size and acquired academic skills, the NSE generates scores. The survey presents the student with a thesis, for example ‘’Programme information provision’’ and with

a numerical scale, starting at 1 (very unsatisfied) and going to 5 (very satisfied). With such theses, the survey covers several components of study programmes (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2020).

For internationalisation, the NSE (from 2017 onward) provides participants with four theses. Students give scores for the extent of stimulation for studying abroad, the extent of stimulation for familiarizing with other cultures, the international aspects in the curriculum and the possibilities for studying abroad. The results on these theses are presented separately and as a mean (general issue score).

Jaar	Netto respons	Netto populatie	Netto respons percentage
2010	225.991	643.615	35,1
2011	207.457	588.571	35,2
2012	202.781	650.458	31,2
2013	264.710	670.669	39,5
2014	232.667	690.649	33,7
2015	275.857	709.205	38,9
2016	303.720	708.748	42,9
2017	281.121	728.741	38,6
2018	268.684	742.451	36,2
2019	93.099	311.316	29,9

Table 4.1: The NSE-population and response rate from 2010 to 2019 (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2020)

With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,91 (Stichting Studiekeuze123, 2019), the internal consistency of the internationalisation score is high. As such, the internationalisation-score in the NSE is a reliable measuring instrument.

However, as already mentioned above, measuring internationalisation is complex. The concept is multi-dimensional and the direct measurement of internationalisation is difficult. The NSE internationalisation-score provides a method of operationalising internationalisation, but it is not comprehensive – it is only one way of looking at internationalisation.

4.2.2. | Measuring accreditation

With regards to the accreditation variable, this research uses CeQuint-certified higher education programmes. The chapter on private regulation in higher education has already briefly dwelled on the ECA, which is an association of recognised accreditation and quality assurance agencies – the so-called member agencies – in Europe (ECA, 2020). It seeks to provide transparent information on the quality of higher education (and internationalisation specifically) and wants to facilitate internationalisation of higher education institutions and students. To achieve this, the ECA offers various services. One of those services is the ''Certificate for quality of internationalisation'' or CeQuint. The CeQuint methodology was

developed by ECA to assess the quality of internationalisation in higher education, at either programme- or institutional level (ECA, 2020).

The ECA-framework tests for various criteria, such as internationalisation goals and achievements, and awards CeQuint-certification when programmes or institutions check off all the boxes. Said CeQuint-certification is a useful independent variable to analyse the relationship between internationalisation scores and accreditation. This would be a so-called 'dummy' variable – scoring 1 for 'yes' and 0 for 'no' on whether CeQuint-certification was obtained. The programmes that have obtained accreditation are therefore marked with a 1 in the dataset and the ones that have not with a 0.

4.2.3. | Identifying comparable programmes

The total sample of the dataset is 2366, of which not all programmes have CeQuint-certification. There are currently around 50 programmes with a valid certificate in total, of which 30 CeQuint-accredited programmes are in the NSE-dataset and therefore in the final sample of 2366. As stated, this larger dataset will be used to see whether CeQuint-accredited programmes score better than non-accredited programmes.

Secondly, a sub-sample was created to present something meaningful on whether CeQuint-accredited programmes scored better than their direct peers. These peers – and programmes in general – can be identified by a so-called CROHO-code. This code exists of two elements, a brin-code (e.g., 21UI) for the institution and an isat-code (e.g., 34963) for the programme. As such, a CROHO-number is a way of identifying a higher education programme. These CROHO numbers were necessary to find the required programmes in the NSE survey dataset.

For the smaller dataset, 8 CeQuint-accredited programmes were selected and all identical isat-code programmes were included. Because some of the identical code programmes had CeQuint-certification as well, this smaller sample contains 17 CeQuint-accredited programmes against 51 non-accredited programmes.

Not all CeQuint-accredited programmes were useful for the abovementioned smaller dataset. Some accredited programmes were unique and had no isat-counterpart. Others did have an isat-counterpart, but this counterpart was not included in the N=2366 dataset.

4.2.4. | Control variables

The main variables used for this research have already been stated earlier in this chapter. In this paragraph, they are explored further. Both the dependent and independent variables are listed.

First of all, internationalisation (score) is the foremost dependent variable. A dependent variable is the 'effect' of independent variables. In other words, its value depends on the independent variable (Bryman, 2015). That would mean that in this research, the internationalisation score depends on a set of independent variables. On top of internationalisation score, the general score is also a dependent variable. It allows for discovering a correlation between general score and CeQuint-certification. Both the internationalisation score and the general score are valued on a range from 1 to 5. The internationalisation score variable is coded with AlgemeenOordeel_19 in the NSE dataset. The general score is coded with AlgemeenOordeel_01 in the NSE dataset.

The most important independent variable is CeQuint-accreditation. The aim of this research is to find out whether and how this variable changes the dependent variables. Does CeQuint-certification change the internationalisation (and general) score? In SPSS, this variable is processed as a 'dummy variable' (Draper and Smith, 1998). This means that no CeQuint is valued with 0 and CeQuint is valued with 1. On top of that variable, other – confounding – independent variables are looked at to test other hypotheses. Two others are looked at; university/HBO and international aim/no international aim. These additional variables are analysed to find out whether they influence the internationalisation score as well. The variables are both dummy variables; university (1) or HBO (0) and international aim (1) or not (0).

The university or HBO variable can shed a light on whether the difference between a university (which is described as a more international environment in the theory) and an HBO influences the dependent variable. This variable can be included rather easily, by classifying the programmes in the NSE-dataset as university or HBO level. The CROHO-code can be used for this classification.

The second variable is international aim. In their goals, programmes can be international. This means that they have a clear international curriculum and clear international goals, as opposed

to programmes who are international in language, students and staff, but place less emphasis on the international aspect in their field of study. European Studies is a clear example of a programme with an international aim, because it literally studies and international field of study. To be able to classify programmes as 'internationally aimed' or not, this research looked at two things (1) language of instruction and (2) curriculum. The first criterium needs to be passed to qualify for the second criterium. The language of instruction is the starting point of an international aim. If a programme is only taught in Dutch, it will not appeal to an international student body and often have a national aim. Secondly, if the curriculum is key to finding out whether a programme has an international aim or not.

To use this as a classification, the programme curriculum had to clearly state its international goals. For example, the MSc Global Health of Maastricht University curriculum (2020) states that research is conducted in an international and intercultural setting. As such, the programme curriculum has a clear international component. The Bachelor of Physiotherapy at Fontys Eindhoven, on the other hand, does not mention internationalisation or interculturalism in its curriculum (2020). While the programme is taught in English, not fulfilling this second criterium rules it out for being 'internationally aimed'. This was done for all 68 programmes in the smaller sample, ranking 1 ('yes') for international aim and 0 ('no') for the lack thereof.

4.2.5. | Statistical test

The goal of this research is to uncover a possible relationship between the dependent and independent variables listed above. More in detail; do the dependent variables (internationalisation score, general score) change as the independent variables change? What is most important here is knowing the value of the dependent variable at a certain value of the independent value. As such, a regression model would fit this research. Regression allows estimations on the relationship between the quantitative variables used in this research. Because this research wants to discover whether there is a relationship between CeQuint and the internationalisation score, it uses a multiple linear regression to discover a relationship between the dependent variable and the multiple independent variables.

5. | Results

The previous chapter showed the research design and methodology that was used for this research. This chapter will explore the results of the analyses described in the abovementioned chapter and present them.

First of all, the larger dataset (N=2366) is looked at on the dependent and independent variables used. Internationalisation score and general score will be tested on their relationship with CeQuint-certification. This will be done with a multiple regression analysis, using institutional level as a control variable. Secondly, a smaller dataset (N=68) containing CeQuint-certified programmes and counterparts with the same CROHO-code is looked at, again using a multiple regression analysis with two control variables. As such, internationalisation will again be looked at through CeQuint-certification as a variable and two other independent variables will be added to discover a relationship with internationalisation score.

5.1 | *Full sample*

With regards to the relationship between internationalisation scores and CeQuint-certification, a multiple linear regression was used to test the hypothesis that CeQuint-certification leads to a higher internationalisation score. With internationalisation score (recorded on a range from 1 to 5) as the dependent variable and CeQuint-certification (a dummy variable with 1 for yes and 0 for no) as the explanatory independent variable. On top of that, a binary control variable was added, namely institutional level.

As explained in the theoretical framework, universities and HBO's tend to differ on internationalisation quality. This chapter translates this into an independent (binary) variable. 0 for HBO-programmes and 1 for university programmes. It allows analysis on whether university programmes score higher on internationalisation. As such, it can be seen whether the difference in institutional level has a significant effect on internationalisation score.

The analysis was first run on the larger dataset (full sample) N=2366, consisting of the scores of 2366 university- and HBO-programmes. First, a table of descriptive statistics is provided and reflected upon after which the same is done for a correlation table. Then, the analysis for both internationalisation and general scores is presented.

5.1.1. | Descriptive statistics and correlations

First, if the descriptive statistics are looked at (table 5.1), for internationalisation score M = 3.52 and SD = 0.53. This entails that the average internationalisation score in this dataset is 3.52, and roughly 68 percent of values are within this range are between 4.05 (M+SD) and 2.99 (M-SD).

If the general satisfaction score is looked at, a higher M (4.04) and a lower SD (0.31) are seen, indicating that the general satisfaction with the program (on average) is higher than the satisfaction with internationalisation.

The CeQuint-certification and the institutional level are binary (or dummy) variables, which explains the outcome for the M and SD there. It shows that about 1% of programs have a CeQuint-certificate. The same reasoning applies to the institutional level mean, which is near 0.50 – indicating a reasonable balance between university and HBO-programmes in the NSE-dataset.

Table 5.1 | Descriptive statistics for internationalisation and general score

	Mean	Std. deviation
CeQuint-certification (binary variable)	0.01	0.11
Institutional level (binary variable)	0.48	0.50
Internationalisation score	3.52	0.53
General score	4.04	0.31
No. observations	2366	

Table 5.2 shows a correlation matrix for all the variables used in this sample. The independent variables (CeQuint, institutional level) show at least some relation to the dependent variables (internationalisation score, general score), with correlation scores of 0.154 and 0.024 for CeQuint and 0.295 and 0.320 for institutional level.

Table 5.2 | Pearson's correlation matrix large sample

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 CeQuint certification	1			
2 Institutional level	-0.018	1		
3 Internationalisation score	0.154**	0.295**	1	
4 General score	0.024**	0.320**	0.420**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

5.1.2. | Internationalisation score regression analysis

A multiple regression analysis is performed to analyse the relationship between CeQuint-certification and internationalisation scores for the larger dataset (N=2366). On top of the independent CeQuint-certification variable, a control variable was added: institutional level.

First of all, CeQuint-certification was found to have a significant positive effect on the internationalisation score, $t(235.062) = 8.221$, $p < 0.05$ (as seen in table 5.3), with the score for CeQuint-accredited programmes being 0.755 points higher ($M = 3.52$). This effect size is significant with 0.755 points added to the scores of accredited programmes. This confirms the hypothesis that CeQuint-certification would increase internationalisation scores. If the control variable for institutional level is looked at, there is also a significant positive effect on internationalisation score $t(235.062) = 15.358$, $p < 0.05$. This would indicate that universities, on average, score higher on internationalisation – a significant effect size of 0.316 points added points for university programmes. This confirms the hypothesis that university programmes score higher on internationalisation than HBO programmes.

Table 5.3 | Regression results for internationalisation scores

	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Constant	3.358	0.014	235.062	0.000
CeQuint-certification	0.755	0.092	8.221	0.000
Institutional level	0.316	0.021	15.358	0.000
R-Squared			0.112	
No. observations			2366	

5.1.4. | General score regression analysis

Secondly, the same is done to analyse the relationship between CeQuint-certification and general satisfaction scores. Again, the institutional level is added as a control variable. CeQuint-certification was found to not have a significant positive effect on the general score, $t(457.359) = 1.549$, $p > 0.05$, with a p-value of 0,121 (as seen in table 5.4). This would indicate that CeQuint-certification has little effect on the general score. This does not confirm the hypothesis that CeQuint-certification leads to a higher general score in the NSE-survey as well.

Secondly, institutional level was found to have a significant positive effect on the general score, $t(457.359) = 16.468$, $p < 0.00$. As such, this would indicate that, on average, university programmes score higher on general satisfaction than HBO programmes (0.200 points higher).

Table 5.4 | Regression results for general scores

	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Constant	3.854	0.008	457.359	0.000
CeQuint-certification	0.084	0.054	1.549	0.121
Institutional level	0.200	0.012	16.468	0.000
R-Squared			0.104	
No. observations			2366	

5.2 | *Small sample*

In the first paragraph a larger dataset was used to test whether CeQuint-certification holds relation to the NSE-scores on internationalisation and general satisfaction. The analysis shows a significant effect of CeQuint-certification on internationalisation scores but less so on general scores. Another takeaway is that the institutional level has a significant effect on internationalisation scores; with university programmes scoring higher than HBO programmes.

To reinforce this analysis, the smaller sample of N=68 is looked at. This sample contains 17 CeQuint-certified programmes and 51 non-accredited counterparts (see the methodology chapter for more context). Now, a multiple regression analysis will be used to see whether the

significant effect of CeQuint that was seen with the larger sample is repeated. Two control variables will be added – institutional level and international aim – in order to separate their effects from the CeQuint- (explanatory) variable.

First, some descriptive statistics are looked at before reaching the actual regression analysis.

5.2.1. | Descriptive statistics

For internationalisation score M = 3.75 and SD = 0.51. The mean is higher in this smaller dataset than it was with N=2366, which might indicate high scores for CeQuint-accredited programmes or simply good quality programmes overall. Furthermore, the SD is a little lower, meaning less deviation from the average 3.75. This also reinforces the assumption that the 68 programmes (on average) scored high on internationalisation.

If the general score is looked at for this smaller dataset, M = 3.87 and SD = 0.24 are seen, indicating that the general score (on average) is higher than the internationalisation score, with a far smaller deviation from that average. The CeQuint-certification again is a binary variable, as are the control variables for institutional level and international aim. The majority of the programmes in the sample are HBO level (M=0.10) and more than half of them (M=0.59) have an international aim.

Table 5.5 | Descriptive statistics for internationalisation and general score

	Mean	Std. deviation
CeQuint-certification (binary variable)	0.25	0.50
Institutional level (binary variable)	0.10	0.31
International aim (binary variable)	0.59	0.50
Internationalisation score	3.75	0.51
General score	3.87	0.24
No. observations	68	

Table 5.6 shows the correlation matrix for all the variables used in this sample. On top of CeQuint and institutional level, international aim was also a independent variable in this sample. Again, the independent variables show some relation to the dependent variables. Both

CeQuint and institutional level have stronger positive relationships with internationalisation score and general score than in the larger sample. The matrix also shows a high positive correlation between international aim en internationalisation score.

Table 5.6 | Pearson's correlation matrix large sample

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 CeQuint certification	1				
2 Institutional level	0.140**	1			
3 International aim	0.483**	0.185**	1		
4 Internationalisation score	0.493**	0.232**	0.743**	1	
5 General score	0.306**	0.213**	0.200**	0.271**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

5.2.2. | Internationalisation score regression analysis

CeQuint-certification was found to have a significant positive effect on the internationalisation score, $t(52.161) = 1.828$, $p < .05$ (Table 5.5.) The coefficient 0.196 shows that on average, certified programs score by 0.196 points higher than programs without certification. This confirms the hypothesis that CeQuint-certification would increase internationalisation scores and reinforces the results of the N=2366 analysis. It is a meaningful effect size, under 1 standard deviation (0.196 vs 0.506). However, it is important to indicate that the CeQuint-coefficient in this sample is smaller than the one in the larger (N=2366) sample. This demonstrates that a part of the effect is explained by the nature of the programme. When a sample solely includes comparable programmes, the effect of CeQuint is smaller.

On top of that, there is a significant positive effect of institutional level ($p < 0.05$) as well, but again it is smaller than was seen in the larger sample. While the majority of the programmes in the sample are HBO programmes (as demonstrated by the mean as well), this would indicate a positive effect of institutional level on internationalisation scores, with university programmes scoring higher on average (by 0.147). This again confirms this hypothesis that university programmes score higher than HBO programmes.

Lastly, there is a significant positive effect of international aim on the internationalisation score ($p < 0.05$). In this sample, that is a very large effect. Programmes with an international aim score 0.658 points higher on their internationalisation scores than programmes without such an aim. This confirms the hypothesis that programmes with a clear international aim score better on internationalisation than their peers without such an aim.

Table 5.7 | Regression results for internationalisation scores (smaller sample)

	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Constant	3.301	0.063	52.161	0.000
CeQuint-certification	0.196	0.107	1.828	0.000
Institutional level	0.147	0.136	1.085	0.000
International aim	0.658	0.095	6.940	0.000
R-Squared			0.584	
No. observations			68	

5.2.3. | General score regression analysis

CeQuint-certification was found not to have a significant positive effect on the general score, $t(86.992) = 1.958$ $p > 0.05$, with a p-value of 0.055. This implies that CeQuint-certification has little effect on the general score. This does not confirm the hypothesis that CeQuint-certification leads to a higher general score in the NSE-survey. As such, it does reaffirm the earlier analysis with the larger dataset.

For institutional level, in contrary to the larger dataset, there is not a significant positive effect on general score, $t(86.992) = 1.412$, $p > 0.05$. This notion does not confirm the hypothesis that university programmes score higher on internationalisation than HBO programmes. There is also no significant positive effect for international aim; $t(86.992) = 0.311$ with $p > 0.05$. The p-value here is 0.757 – indicating no statistical relationship.

Table 5.8 | Regression results for general scores (smaller sample)

	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Constant	3.810	0.044	86.992	0.000
CeQuint-certification	0.145	0.074	1.958	0.055
Institutional level	0.133	0.094	1.412	0.163
International aim	0.020	0.066	0.311	0.757
R-Squared			0.584	
No. observations			68	

This smaller sample analysis adds to the earlier demonstrated relationship between internationalisation scores and CeQuint-certification; and that said accreditation leads to higher internationalisation scores. This is not so much the same for general scores, as already seen in paragraph 1 as well, where there is not a strong effect of CeQuint on general satisfaction. For institutional level, the smaller sample shows a positive effect of a higher (university) institutional level for internationalisation scores but no such a relationship for general scores. In addition, the control variable international aim has a very significant effect on internationalisation scores, but little to no effect on the general score.

The implications, ideas and conclusion of this analysis will be discussed in the next chapter.

6. | Discussion

This research aims to find out if the certification of internationalisation by private certification bodies, leads to actual (better) internationalisation. As such, it has analysed the effect of the ECA CeQuint certification on internationalisation scores and, by doing so, the larger effect on the quality of internationalisation. The larger, overall question behind this research is whether voluntary regulation in the (semi-)public sectors works, as an alternative to government interference. To analyse this, a research question was posed: ‘’To what extent does the perceived internationalisation quality of higher education programs coincide with internationalisation certification of the ECA?’’.

With the results of statistical analysis demonstrated in the previous chapter, this chapter will continue on those results. By providing an interpretation of the previously described results, the following paragraphs will try to formulate a basis for answering the research questions.

The chapter will first review the results in relation to the literature (as provided in chapters 2 and 3) before interpreting the effects of the results on the set hypotheses. Thereafter, a paragraph providing the limitations of this research will be presented.

6.2. | *Key findings*

As stated above, the main goal of this research was to find out whether private regulation (in the form of accreditation of higher education) leads to the improvement of quality – in this case, the improvement of the quality of internationalisation in higher education. To analyse this, the research dove into the relationship between NSE-internationalisation scores and CeQuint-certification.

With an average score of 3.93 for internationalisation at programmes without CeQuint-certification, and an average score of 4.25 for those with CeQuint-certification, one can already see that accredited programmes score higher than their non-accredited counterparts. The question lingering then is, is this because of CeQuint-certification or do other variables account for this score?

The results indicate that CeQuint-certification has a significant effect on internationalisation scores. This correlation is in line with the literature and hypothesis 1. As Provost (2012) mentions, private regulation leads to higher commitment to goals and quality. In his research,

this leads to the compliance of ISO-standards and, thus, successful private regulation. The same could possibly happen here. Programmes complying to ECA-standards for obtaining CeQuint-certification commit to high quality which then translates into higher internationalisation scores. The research tried to capture this hypothesis in H1 (chapter 3). The analysis enforces this hypothesis by demonstrating a significant positive effect of CeQuint-certification on internationalisation scores. As such, this analysis supports the theory that privately regulated higher education programmes score better on internationalisation than their non-privately regulated counterparts.

On the other hand, it is important to take notion of the analysis of a smaller sample (chapter 5). The large positive effect that CeQuint had in the larger sample, is much smaller in the N=68 set. This would entail that a part of the positive effect is due to the nature of the programme (the international aim or an international curriculum) and not merely because of the certificate.

The analysis furthermore researched the relationship between CeQuint-certification and general scores. There it was found that CeQuint-certification holds little to no influence over general scores, which is contrary to the hypothesized association. While various scholars, such as Hauptman Komotar (2018) argue that higher education programmes choose to be privately regulated because it improves overall quality (and therefore attracts more students), that argument does not apply here. On the other hand, because CeQuint-certification is so clearly aimed at internationalisation, Hauptman Komotars (2018) argument holds well (the overall quality of internationalisation is improved).

On top of looking into the effect of CeQuint-certification on internationalisation scores, this research also looked at whether these scores hold a relationship with the institutional level (university or HBO) and the international aim of a programme.

With regards to the institutional level, the analysis shows a relationship between the internationalisation score and the institutional level. Universities averagely score higher on internationalisation than HBO institutions. This reinforces De Wit (2011), who argues that universities are and have been internationally oriented for a very long time, which translates into higher scores on internationalisation. It could indeed be true that universities are in essence more international (and more experienced with internationalisation) – as De Wit

mentions (2011). This would confirm the hypothesis that universities score higher on internationalisation. Again, the effect is slightly less in the smaller sample, possibly indicating that something else accounts for the higher internationalisation score – such as the nature of a programme and not institutional level.

Lastly, the research hypotheses stated that a programme with a clear international aim would also score higher on internationalisation than those programmes without such an aim. The analysis confirms this hypothesis, demonstrating that programmes classified as ‘’internationally aimed’’ score higher on internationalisation. In line with the hypothesis, there is a positive significant effect of international aim on internationalisation score.

6.3. | *Implications*

First of all, and most straightforward, this research shows the positive effect of CeQuint-certification on programme scores for internationalisation. Indeed, this is the most direct result of this research, but not the only implication. There are more, and larger, implications that also find resonance in the literature.

The main topics of this thesis have been internationalisation and (even more so) private regulation. In this research, the latter comes in the shape of a private regulatory scheme (or private certification); the CeQuint-certification. While, as stated above, the main goal was to find a relationship between said accreditation and internationalisation quality (measured in a NSE-score), this goal also has larger implications for private regulation (on internationalisation) as a whole. In chapter three, this thesis explores the issue of private regulation and the rationales behind it. As Gavronski et al. (2008) mention, actors are willing to regulate themselves voluntarily if the gains weight up against the costs. By regulating themselves through private certification, actors comply with the (often high) demands of gaining such a certificate. As said, they are willing to do this because of the gains outweighing the efforts. In case of internationalisation and CeQuint-certification, programmes or institutions comply to the strict ECA-criteria because having a CeQuint-certification can give them benefits, such as a higher international student population – and therefore more financial profit.

In this research, it becomes clear that the private regulation of higher education internationalisation leads to higher internationalisation scores. Students of CeQuint-accredited

programmes rate their programmes better on internationalisation than students of non-CeQuint-accredited programmes. This implies that privately regulated programmes are perceived of better quality than those who do not. Even if we cannot establish with certainty that the certificate itself makes programmes better, they do provide accurate information to students on the quality of internationalisation, as perceived by students.

Programmes without CeQuint-certification can see that getting certification helps in achieving higher scores. As such, an implication of this research could be that non-CeQuint programmes will start pursuing CeQuint-certification to get a similar effect. This is a positive development, as those programmes will probably enhance the quality of their internationalisation through the accreditation process (a win-win).

Looking at the broader picture, this thesis is a small 'building block' in the larger whole of private regulation research. It implies that through private regulation, positive effects can be achieved (in this case higher perceived quality), enhancing a product, service or goal. By privately regulating yourself as an organisation, you can benefit from the gains. These are the gains Gavronski et al. (2008) mention as motivations for seeking private regulation.

On the other hand, this research implies that CeQuint-certification does not result in a higher general score, and that simply having an international aim (without accreditation) is also beneficial. Programmes might not want to seek accreditation if their goal is improving the general quality (and therefore the general score). Others might feel that solely having an international aim is sufficient – sparing themselves the transactions costs of regulation.

6.4. | *Limitations and suggestions for further research*

This chapter already spelled out some of the ideas and implications derived from the analysis. However, the research and the used modus operandi present some limitations as well. This paragraph lists those limitations.

Firstly, this thesis only used the NSE-survey scores on internationalisation to see whether there is a relationship between CeQuint-certification and internationalisation quality. The question remains whether this completely covers the effect of accreditation on internationalisation, or whether there are other ways of approaching this. Student satisfaction is only one aspect of it and there could be more direct measurements – which are less

perception-based. For example, the international competences that students develop. But also; do staff members perceive the high quality as well? And does a score on internationalisation sufficiently express how students feel about internationalisation and the various components of it? Future research should aim at exploring more approaches in researching the relationship between accreditation and internationalisation.

Secondly, the research only covered one year (2018) of the NSE-survey. It could be that the scores of previous (and future) years are different. Comparing the scores of previous years could be interesting for future research. On top of only looking at one year, the thesis did not take the date of certification in consideration. As such, programmes which have had the accreditation for a longer time might have initially scored lower (or higher). Certificates are valid for four years; it is possible that the effect of CeQuint fades over the years – being very strong in the beginning but weak in the end. This risk is lessened because the programmes with 2017 accreditation show higher internationalisation scores than non-accredited programmes as well.

Lastly, another (minor) limitation was that not all ECA-accredited programmes were included in the NSE-survey dataset. However, this has little influence over the generalizability of the results because there were sufficient CeQuint-certified programmes in the set to compensate.

All in all, the analysis gives a sufficient answer to the research questions – as there indeed is a relationship between accreditation and internationalisation quality visible here.

On top of the implications and limitations, this study also shows potential for additional or similar research. As mentioned in the introduction, private regulation is a growing phenomenon and thus, a topic of interest to scholars. More and more actors privately regulate themselves (for the reasons given in the chapters on literature) and private regulation becomes an alternative to classic regulation. This is interesting for both governments (who do not have to regulate said actors) and actors who are interested in self-regulation. There is still a lot of research possible – whether it is on private regulation of private or public actors. More research means more insight in the strengths and weaknesses of private regulation, private regulation as an alternative to classic regulation and private certification.

On top of this – and more in sync with this thesis – it would be interesting to further explore the relationship between accreditation and internationalisation by, for example, a qualitative study interviewing students and staff of CeQuint- and non-CeQuint accredited programmes or to observe a programme-curriculum directly. By doing so, a more in-depth analysis of motives and thoughts on internationalisation can be made. By comparing views, both student and staff perspectives can be taken into account. Such a research would shed further light on the effects of private certification on higher education institutions and programmes.
Lastly, a more in-depth regression analysis, using the various components of the NSE internationalisation scores (such as stimulation of internationalisation), could be interesting as well. By doing so, a broader analysis of the relationship between internationalisation and CeQuint certifications can be made – in which the more influential factors of internationalisation can then be distinguished.

7. | Conclusion

Through the years, private voluntary regulation has grown in both prominence and scope; becoming a regularity instead of a rarity. Governments see a way of not having to regulate by themselves, saving them time, costs and efforts, and actors (such as universities) see a way of benefiting from regulating themselves. This thesis explored said private voluntary regulation by looking specifically at private regulation in higher education – more specifically in internationalisation of higher education.

Internationalisation nowadays is an existential part of institutions of higher education. Many universities (of applied sciences) have an international student and staff body, have exchange programmes or work together with foreign universities in their research. Indeed, as has been argued by scholars, internationalisation is inseparable with academic research as knowledge is universal. But institutions are also eager to internationalize to profit from the economic benefits; preparing students for a global labour market but also generating more income. The enormous surge of internationalisation has put (European) governments but also institutions for important questions. One of those questions relates to the quality of internationalisation. How do measure and thereafter regulate that quality?

Private regulation offers solace here. It basically entails that (public) institutions or private actors or businesses voluntarily self-regulate themselves to comply to certain standards. The rationales behind self-regulation are diverse, as this thesis has mentioned economic but also intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. A prominent example here is the ISO-standards; a private actor (ISO) issued regulations to which actors complied to meet (for example) external or internal pressures. A similar idea is the accreditation of higher education. In Europe, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) issues accreditation on internationalisation in higher education. By meeting the stringent ECA-standards, higher education institutions and programmes can gain accreditation; an assurance of high quality that can attract more students.

This research looked at the effectiveness of private regulation by analysing the relationship between internationalisation and ECA (or CeQuint)-accreditation. Internationalisation (satisfaction) is measured each year by the Nationale Studenten Enquete (NSE); a survey that allows students to score their university programme on several aspects. The NSE-data from 2018 was used for this research, allowing a regression analysis to find out whether CeQuint-

certification has any effect on internationalisation scores. This was first done on the original, large dataset of 2366 programmes and again on a smaller dataset, containing 68 comparable programmes. The general score was also looked at to see whether CeQuint-certification has a larger effect than just on internationalisation. On top of that, the dependent variable internationalisation score was analysed by using two control variables (institutional level, international aim) to see the effect of CeQuint-certification in a broader scope of variables.

The analysis showed a significant effect of CeQuint-certification on internationalisation scores – confirming the hypothesis that accreditation leads to higher scores. While the analysis also showed that CeQuint-certification does little for general scores, having an international aim and a higher institutional level also contribute to higher internationalisation scores.

The research question ‘’To what extent does the perceived internationalisation quality of higher education programs coincide with internationalisation certification of the ECA?’’ can be answered as followed: the analysis of this thesis shows that perceived internationalisation quality is higher when a programme has obtained CeQuint-certification. As such, the perceived quality coincides with CeQuint-certification, as the intended quality assurance appears to have effect.

All in all, this particular research shows that the rationale behind private regulation (benefiting from it, despite the transaction costs) is well-grounded. University (of applied sciences) programmes that gain accreditation for their internationalisation quality will see the results of their efforts in their internationalisation scores. Private regulation is beneficial for the regulated actors.

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