

Framework Document for the evaluation of official university study programmes

AQUIB | Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
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Table of acronyms and abbreviations

ANECA	National Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation
AQUIB	Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
CET	Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation
CGQ	Responsible for the quality management of the training programme
CURSA	University Commission for the Regulation of Follow-up and Accreditation
DTIE	Simultaneous academic programmes for double degrees with specific itinerary
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEES	European Higher Education Area
EOP	Optional evidence
EQAR	European Register of Quality Agencies
ESG	Criteria and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EEES
EV	Evidence of site visit
IA	Self-assessment report
IDS	Final follow-up report
IFA	Final ex-post accreditation report
IPA	Provisional ex-post accreditation report
IPS	Provisional follow-up reports
MV	Verified report
REACU	Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies
RUCT	Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees
SIGC	Internal Quality Assurance System
SIIU	Integrated University Information System

1. INTRODUCTION

Organic Law 2/2023 of 22 March on the University System stipulates that the functions of institutional accreditation, evaluation of university degrees and follow-up of results and reports in the university field, in addition to any other function attributed to them by state and autonomous community laws, correspond to the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and to the evaluation agencies of the autonomous communities registered in the European Register of Quality Agencies (EQAR)¹.

Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, and Royal Decree 99/2011, of 28 January, which regulates official PhD studies, establish three phases in the process of implementing a university degree, master's degree or PhD programme. In the first phase, the university must present its degree project for ex-ante accreditation and subsequent authorisation for implementation by the Ministry responsible for higher education (through the Council of Universities) and the Autonomous Community. Once the degree programme has been implemented, it is then monitored. Finally, its accreditation is renewed in the periods established in the aforementioned legislation, provided that it has been implemented in accordance with the initial project or its subsequent modifications and its evolution justifies its continuity.

In the fourth transitional provision of Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, it is established that the quality assurance agencies of the autonomous communities which, at the time of entry into force of the R.D., are not yet registered in EQAR have a transitional period of four years in which they can continue to develop their own functions and which are established in this regulation in relation to university quality assurance procedures.

Article 14 of Royal Decree 640/2021 of 27 July on the creation, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres and institutional accreditation of university centres establishes the possibility of institutional accreditation of university centres as an alternative to the degree evaluation model.

¹ The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

In accordance with the above legislation, the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQUIB), as an external quality assurance agency for higher education in the Balearic Islands, carries out the evaluation work for the follow-up and ex-post accreditation of official university education. AQUIB also complies with the guidelines and lines of action agreed by the University Commission for the Follow-up regulation and Accreditation (CURSA)², as well as by the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU).

In the design and development of quality assurance processes for official university education, the AQUIB is governed by the international criteria and guidelines established in the document *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*³, which emphasise that institutions are primarily responsible for quality assurance and that they must gain and maintain the trust of the student body and other agents involved in higher education.

The purpose of this document is to present to the agents involved in the different processes of quality assessment of official higher education courses - higher education institutions, students, teaching staff, assessment commissions, educational administrations, employers and other stakeholders - both the procedure to be followed and the aspects valued.

² Commission approved by the Council of Universities and by the General Conference on University Policy

³ These criteria and guidelines are available at <http://www.engq.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

2. FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

2.1. Life cycle of official university studies

The legislation regulating official university education in Spain generally provides for a cyclical process to ensure the external quality assurance of university degrees in Spain.

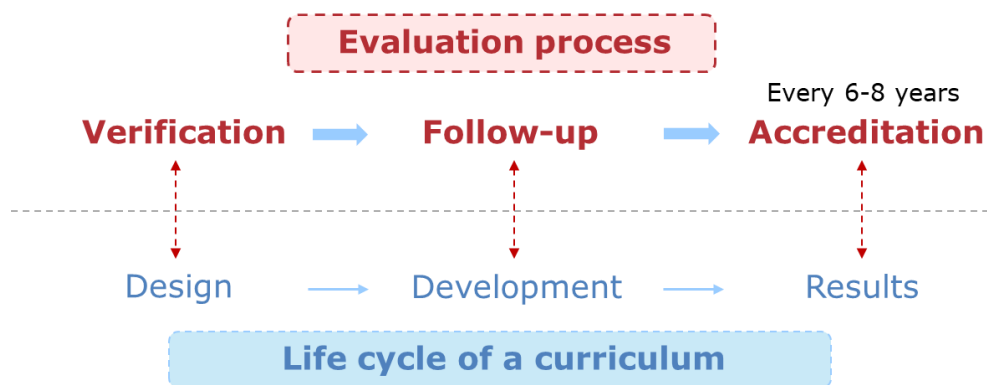


Figure 1. Life cycle of a curriculum

As shown in Figure 1, this evaluation process consists of three phases: **ex-ante evaluation** or **verification** (for which ANECA establishes the VERIFICA programme), **ex-dure evaluation** or **follow-up** (in which AQUIB sets up the Follow-up Programme for Official University study programmes), and **ex-post accreditation** or **renewal of accreditation** (in which AQUIB carries out the Programme for ex-post Accreditation of Official University Degrees). These phases correspond, respectively, to three stages in the life of a curriculum: its design, development or implementation and the review of its results, in which the protagonist is the university. Various institutional agents are involved in the process (Council of Universities, evaluation agencies, etc.).

With the above-mentioned processes of quality evaluation of official university education, the greater autonomy of higher education institutions in the design of their degree programmes is combined with a system of external evaluation. This provides clear indications of the effectiveness of teaching and, consequently, of the accountability of the institution.

2.2. Evaluation model

Figure 2 shows the quality evaluation model of official higher education, which is established around three dimensions:

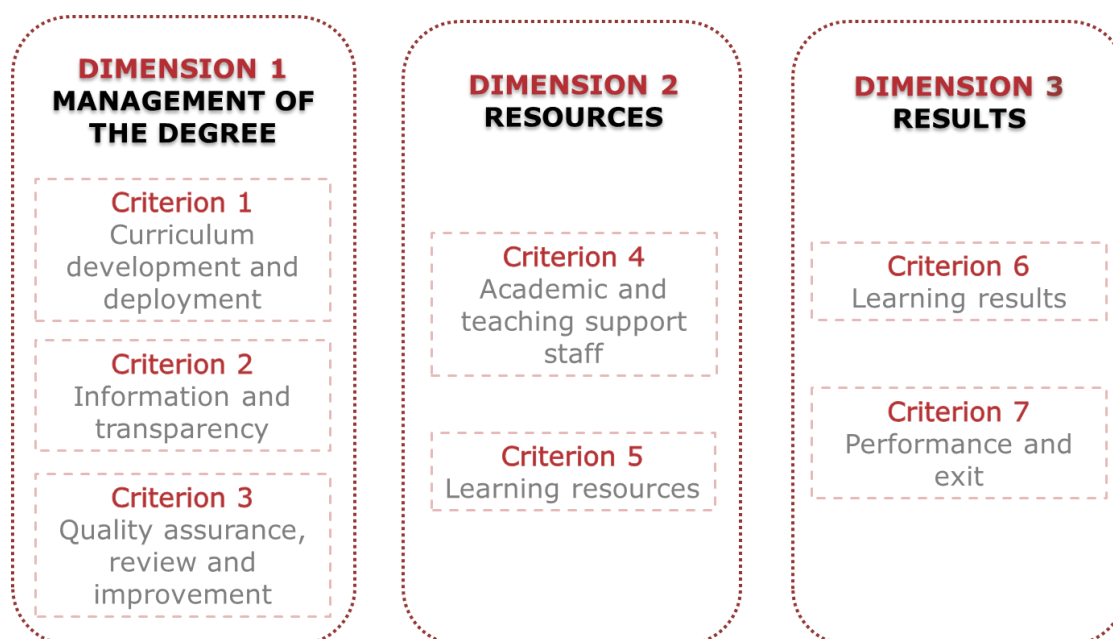


Figure 2. Dimensions of the evaluation model

- **Dimension 1: management of the study programme.** The management is analysed; along with the organisation of the curriculum (including access, teaching coordination mechanisms and credit transfer and recognition systems); the transparency and visibility of the information provided by the study programme to the different stakeholders; and the effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) as an instrument for collecting information, analysing it, implementing improvement actions and follow-up them.
- **Dimension 2: resources.** The adequacy and sufficiency of the academic and support staff, as well as the material resources, infrastructures and services made available to students to guarantee the achievement of the results defined by the study programme are analysed.
- **Dimension 3: results.** Aspects related to the results of the study programme and their evolution are assessed. In this sense, the mechanisms established by the institution to verify that students adequately acquire the learning results defined in the study programme are considered. More specifically, compliance with those that define the graduate profile is assessed. The evolution of the academic,

professional (employability) and personal (satisfaction with the learning experience) result indicators is also analysed.

These three dimensions are further developed into a set of criteria and guidelines. These show which aspects are analysed when determining whether or not a study programme receives a favourable report in the follow-up and ex-post accreditation processes. The seven criteria apply across the board to all study programmes⁴ and cover internationally recognised quality principles in terms of: curriculum development and deployment; information and transparency; quality assurance, review and improvement; academic staff and teaching support staff; learning resources; learning results; performance indicators and graduation.

The table below shows the correspondence between the three dimensions and the European standards set out in the document *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

⁴ It is necessary to specify the particularities that this process may have with respect to PhD studies, since the definition of the standard of the criterion may vary.

FOLLOW-UP AND EX-POST ACCREDITATION		CURRICULUM (VERIFICATION)	ESG CRITERIA
I. MANAGEMENT OF THE DEGREE	1. Curriculum development and deployment	1. Description, training objectives and justification of the study programme. 3. Admission, recognition and mobility. 4. Teaching planning. 7. Timetable for implementation.	1.2. Programme design and approval. 1.4. Admission, development, recognition and certification of the student body. 1.3. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment. 1.6. Resources for learning and student support.
	2. Information and transparency	8. Internal Quality Assurance System.	1.8. Public information.
	3. Quality assurance, review and improvement		1.1. Quality assurance policy. 1.9. Continuous follow-up and regular evaluation of the programmes. 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance.
II. RESOURCES	4. Academic and teaching support staff	5. Academic and teaching support staff.	1.5. Teaching staff.
	5. Resources for learning	6. Learning resources: materials and infrastructures, practices and services.	1.6. Resources for learning and student support.
III. RESULTS	6. Learning results	2. Results of the training and learning process.	1.2. Programme design and approval.
	7. Satisfaction and graduation	3. Internal Quality Assurance System.	1.7. Information management.

Table 1. Correlation between dimensions and ESG criteria.

Likewise, evaluations will take into account the reference to democratic principles and values and the Sustainable Development Goals in the curricula and, in particular:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental rights; democratic values - freedom of thought and teaching, tolerance and recognition of and respect for diversity, equality for all citizens, the elimination of all discriminatory content or practices, the culture of peace and participation, among others.

- Respect for gender equality.
- Respect for the principles of universal accessibility and design for all.
- Addressing sustainability and climate change.
- Compliance with occupational risk prevention safety regulations.

2.3. Evaluation Commissions

In the external assessment programmes of official university programmes carried out by AQUIB, the body in charge is mainly the Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET), divided into two subcommissions by branches of knowledge - Subcommission for Arts and Humanities and Social and Legal Sciences; Subcommissions for Sciences, Health Sciences and Engineering and Architecture. This is made up of academic profile evaluators, who represent the branches of knowledge; professional profile evaluators (if applicable); technical profile evaluators from the area of university quality evaluation; and student evaluators. Both the number of evaluators and their profile guarantee the effectiveness of peer review in the follow-up and accreditation processes.

The other specific evaluation bodies are the evaluation panels, which are set up *ad hoc* for the evaluation of specific degrees and are called the Panel of Experts. The functioning and specific composition of the panel is regulated in the corresponding evaluation guide. In all cases, the secretariat of the evaluation bodies is provided by AQUIB. In general, this evaluation team is made up of academic staff specialised in the study programmes; a student; technical staff; and a person with a professional profile, if required. In addition, if considered necessary, it may also include people working outside Spain.

2.4. Complaints, claims, appeals and compliments

AQUIB's Guarantee Commission may act in the event of receiving a complaint, claim or appeal on any aspect related to the evaluation process of official university courses. The Commission acts in accordance with its regulations and the internal procedure of AQUIB.

3. VERIFICATION OF OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY COURSES AND THEIR MODIFICATIONS

At present, ANECA is responsible for evaluating the verification of curricula leading to the award of university bachelor's, master's and PhD study programmes in the Balearic Islands, as well as for evaluating proposals for their modification.

According to R.D. 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, the Autonomous Community, in the exercise of its powers, carries out a mandatory report on the academic and social need and viability of the implementation of the official university degree prior to the start of the study programme verification procedure.

Once the university has submitted its project for the implementation of a new study programme, after the corresponding agency has issued the mandatory report on the verification of the quality of the curricula report with a favourable result and a positive verification resolution has been issued by the University Council's Commission for the Verification and Evaluation of Curriculum, this is notified to the applicant university. It is also communicated to the Autonomous Community/s where these universities are located, to the corresponding quality agency and to the Ministry of Universities. After the authorisation of the Autonomous Community has been issued, the Universities Council verifies the curriculum, the official nature of the degree is established by agreement of the Council of Ministers and it is published in the *Official State Gazette*. Finally, it is registered in the Spanish Registry of Universities, Centres and Qualifications (RUCT).

Once the official status and validity of the university study programme has been established, the rector of the corresponding university -or of the university coordinating the study programme- orders the publication of the curriculum in the *Official State Gazette* and in the official gazette of the corresponding Autonomous Community. This must also be specified in the publication of the academic structure of the study programme. From its official publication, the university/universities that have promoted the programme have a maximum of two academic years to implement and start teaching it. Teaching courses that have been positively verified are subject to the follow-up and ex-post accreditation by AQUIB.

4. FOLLOW-UP OF OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

4.1. Programme objectives, scope, periodicity and results.

4.1.1. Objectives

According to the guidelines from the criterion "1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance (ESG)", external quality assurance has to verify the effectiveness of the institutions' internal quality assurance, as well as to provide information that guarantees the quality of the institution's activities. In this sense, AQUIB defines the follow-up process of official university education by means of the following purposes:

- To ensure the effective execution of the courses in accordance with the curriculum of the degree implemented, as stated in the RUCT together with the modifications approved by the Council of Universities and authorised, where applicable, by the Autonomous Communities.
- Ensure the public availability of relevant and pertinent information to the different stakeholders of the university system.
- Detect possible deficiencies in the effective development of teaching and analyse the actions taken to remedy them.
- Provide suggestions for improvement in the course of the implementation of the syllabus.
- Identify good practices for dissemination within the university system.
- Evaluate the status of the improvement actions to which the university has committed itself, following previous external evaluations.
- Evidence that the university's SIGC contributes to the effectiveness of the implementation of the study programme.

The study programme follow-up process enables the quality of the programme to be evaluated in terms of: *(i)* compliance with the verified implementation project, i.e. the correspondence between what is offered in the university's public information and what is established in the latest MV; *(ii)* the evolution of its results through the evidence and indicators presented; *(iii)* the orientation towards continuous improvement, materialised in obtaining sufficient and reliable data - as well as in analysing those responsible for the degree - and the establishment of an improvement plan and the effective implementation of the proposed actions, among others ; *(iv)* the analysis and response to previous external evaluation reports.

4.1.2. *Scope*

AQUIB monitors the official university teaching of study programme taught in university centres that are not institutionally accredited at the university system of the Balearic Islands.

4.1.3. *Periodicity*

In accordance with R.D. 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, with the guidelines of AQUIB and with what is reflected in the external evaluation reports - verification, follow-up, modification and ex-post accreditation - the university carries out its follow-up three years after the effective implementation of the study programme. After the ex-post accreditation, the periodicity of follow-up is established by the CET.

In line with its commitment to continuous improvement, in addition to the provisions of the aforementioned decree, AQUIB carries out an additional follow-up in the event that the result of the last Final Follow-up Report (IDS) is unfavourable.

4.1.4. *Results of the evaluation process*

The main result of the follow-up process of official university studies is an individualised follow-up report by study programme in terms of **favourable**, **favourable with aspects that will be of special attention in future external evaluation processes** or **unfavourable**.

4.2. Assessment of the criteria

4.2.1. Levels

Compliance with the criteria and guidelines in the follow-up is assessed according to the scale of levels shown below.

Compliance achieved, differentiated where appropriate into:

- It is excellently achieved (A) when no deficiencies have been detected, the curriculum development excels in its field and relevant good practices are identified.
- It is achieved (B):
 - When the development of the curriculum is found to be in line with the planned one, without any deficiencies being detected in the development of the curriculum.
 - When the requirements or aspects identified as requiring special attention in previous external evaluation reports have been addressed.
- It is partially achieved (C):
 - When deficiencies are detected in the development of the curriculum. These require the implementation of improvement actions.
 - Where the "areas for special attention in future evaluations" identified in the IFA issued from 2024 onwards have not been addressed.

Compliance not achieved:

- Not achieved (D) when serious breaches are detected in the commitments made in the last verified report (MV) of the curriculum or in previous external evaluations.

4.2.2. Reasons for the report

Taking into consideration the assessment assigned to each criterion, the overall assessment is in terms of **favourable**, **favourable with aspects to be given special attention in future external evaluation processes** or **unfavourable**. The follow-up reports point out good practices, suggestions for improvement, aspects that will receive special attention in future evaluations and requirements.

Depending on the nature of the study programme and its teaching-learning modality, the detection of serious deficiencies may lead to the issuing of an unfavourable report. Serious non-compliance leads directly to unfavourable follow-up reports.

These are considered serious breaches:

- Deficiencies which, having been detected and the need to remedy them indicated in the external evaluation reports, have not been corrected over a period of six years (the period between two ex-post accreditations).
- Failure to fulfil clear commitments and training objectives assumed in the last verified report that affect the nature, objectives and characteristics of the study programme.
- Non-compliance with commitments in the criteria:
 - Academic staff.
 - Material resources and support services.
 - Learning results.

4.2.3. Multi-Centre study programmes

The evaluation of study programmes taught in several centres of the same university must be carried out on an individual basis. Thus, a single follow-up report must be issued for each study programme and centre.

4.2.4. Inter-University study programme

In the case of inter-university courses, follow-up is carried out by the agency that corresponds to the coordinating university of the study programme.

4.3. Evaluation for study programme follow-up

4.3.1. Information on which the evaluation is based

AQUIB uses as a basis the following information to assess the criteria and guidelines described in the previous sections:

- The last MV.
- Verification/modification reports issued by ANECA.

- The annual internal study programme follow-up reports drawn up by the university.
- The external follow-up reports carried out on the degree programme by AQUIB.
- Where applicable, the ex-post accreditation reports.
- Evidence and indicators obtained from the SIGC. In the case of official university education, information from the Integrated University Information System (SIIU).

All this information forms part of the so-called *study programme dossier*. The evidence required varies according to the degree of maturity of the SIGC, as well as the implementation of SIGC certification or faculty assessment programmes.

4.3.2. Study programme follow-up procedure

This process is carried out in accordance with the following phases:

- **Planning of the follow-up programme.** AQUIB selects the study programmes that are subject to specific follow-up each year, as set out in *point 4.1.3*.
- **Submission of the annual follow-up reports.** The university prepares the annual follow-up and evaluation report (IAS) for each of the study programmes selected. This report must contain: a qualitative assessment of compliance with the evaluation criteria, the evolution of the main study programme indicators, access to public information and the updated enhancement plan.
- **Individual assessment of the study programme.** AQUIB assigns the degrees to be followed up to experts in their field of knowledge, who form part of the Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET). It also informs them of the protocol to be followed (guides, templates, deadlines, etc.) and provides them with the study programme dossier. Study programmes are analysed on an individual basis according to the evaluation criteria.
- **Interim follow-up reports (IPS).** The individual ex-ante evaluations are pooled in order to draw up the IPS. This is agreed by the corresponding sub-commission of the CET and sent to the presidency for signature.
- **Submission of the response and/or improvement actions.** AQUIB sends the provisional follow-up reports to the university so that it can submit a written response and proposals for improvement, and/or allegations, if it deems it appropriate, within 20 working days.
- **Final follow-up reports.** The CET reviews the written response and the improvement plan, if any, within the deadline and issues the final follow-up report for each study programme, which AQUIB sends to the university.

According to Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, in the event that serious breaches of the commitments made in the curriculum report are detected, AQUIB notifies the governing bodies of the centre and the university of these facts. It also notifies the Autonomous Community for action to be taken, adopting the measures deemed appropriate to safeguard the educational interests of the students, which may, where appropriate, lead to the termination of the degree.

- **Complaints.** The university may submit complaints or claims to AQUIB in the event of disagreement with the result of the assessment of a study programme, with any stage of the process or about the assessors involved in the process.

The Commission of Guarantees of AQUIB analyses the complaint and issues the corresponding report, within a maximum period of one month. Once the report has been received, the Agency notifies the university of the result. In the absence of an express resolution within the aforementioned period, the complaint may be considered rejected.

- **Meta-evaluation.** Once the follow-up has been completed, AQUIB analyses its evolution and results, taking into account the opinion of the main agents involved: the CET, those responsible for quality at the institutions evaluated and, in the event of complaints, the Guarantees Commission. In addition, satisfaction surveys are systematically carried out among the evaluators, the results of which are taken into account in the assessment of the process. A report with the results and main conclusions of the meta-evaluation of the follow-up process is drawn up by the AQUIB.

5. EX-POST ACCREDITATION OF OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY COURSES

The renewal of accreditation is part of the compulsory global evaluation process that official university courses registered in RUCT must periodically undergo.

5.1. Objectives, scope, periodicity and results

5.1.1. Objectives

The assessment for the ex-post accreditation is based on compliance with the commitments assumed by the university for the delivery of the study programme and on its results. The reason for focusing on the results is determined by the moment in time at which the programme is evaluated, i.e. once it has been implemented, and must be a

consequence of the two prior evaluation processes to which all official study programmes must be subjected. The general objectives of the ex-post accreditation are as follows:

- To ensure the quality of the training programme offered by following the criteria of the current legal regulations. Consequently, the quality in the achievement of the learning results.
- To guarantee that the development of the study programme is carried out in accordance with the latest verified report, with adequate resources and with the support of an internal quality assurance system that allows for reflection and effective improvement of the study programme.
- To ensure that the study programme has an appropriate follow-up process and that the quantitative and qualitative information available is used to analyse its development and generate the relevant proposals for improvement.
- To ensure the availability and accessibility of valid, reliable, pertinent and relevant public information that helps in the decision-making process of the different users and stakeholders of the university system.
- To provide suggestions for improvement for the study programme that support the internal processes of quality improvement of the training programme and its deployment.

In this sense, the ex-post accreditation process makes it possible to verify, on the one hand, that the study programme is being developed in accordance with the objectives set out in the last verified report. On the other hand, the results obtained and their evolution justify the renewal of accreditation. This assessment process also helps those in charge of the study programme to identify those aspects to which special attention should be paid in order to improve its results.

The duration of the administrative process of re-accreditation is from the time the university submits the application for re-accreditation to the Council of Universities, together with the certificate of the visit issued by AQUIB, until the Council of Universities issues the final decision on the ex-post accreditation of the study programme.

5.1.2. *Scope*

AQUIB carries out the evaluation for the ex-post accreditation of official university education for degrees taught in university centres that are not institutionally accredited in the university system of the Balearic Islands.

5.1.3. Periodicity

According to R.D. 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, university centres that are not institutionally accredited must renew the accreditation of their official university study programme following the procedure established by each Autonomous Community. The Council of Universities decides on the basis of the mandatory and binding report of the corresponding quality agency, within the following deadlines:

- **Official university study programmes (240 ECTS), master's degrees and PHD programmes.** Maximum period of six years, from the date of commencement of the degree or renewal of the previous accreditation.
- **Official undergraduate university study programmes (300 or 360 ECTS).** Maximum period of eight years, from the date of commencement of the degree or renewal of the previous accreditation.

Likewise, during the process of ex-post accreditation, it is not possible to have a process of modification of the study programme open.

5.1.4. Result of the evaluation process

The result of the ex-post accreditation assessment process is a reasoned report in terms of **favourable** or **unfavourable**.

5.2. Assessment of the criteria

5.2.1. Levels

Compliance with the accreditation criteria and guidelines is assessed, according to the scale of levels shown below:

Compliance achieved, which differs in:

- It is excellently achieved (A) when no shortcomings have been detected, the curriculum development excels in its field and relevant good practices are identified.
- It is achieved (B) when the development of the curriculum is in accordance with the plan, without any deficiencies detected in the development of the curriculum.
- It is partially achieved (C) when deficiencies are detected in the development of

the curriculum, but no serious breaches are detected in the commitments acquired in the last verified report. The deficiencies detected entail the requirement to implement improvement actions.

Compliance not achieved:

- **Not achieved (D)** when non-compliance with the commitments made in the last verified report is detected. For example, when the aspects highlighted as requiring special attention in previous external assessment reports have not been addressed.

5.2.2. Grounds for the report

Taking into consideration the assessment assigned to each criterion, the overall assessment is given in terms of **favourable** or **unfavourable**. The reports favourable to the renewal of accreditation may point out requirements, aspects that will be the object of special attention in future evaluations and suggestions for improvement.

Depending on the nature of the study programme and its teaching-learning mode, the identification of serious deficiencies may lead to the issuing of an unfavourable report. Serious non-compliances, which are detailed below, directly lead to unfavourable accreditation reports:

- Deficiencies which, having been detected and the need to remedy them indicated in the previous external evaluation reports, have not been corrected in the period between accreditation renewals.
- Failure to fulfil clear commitments and training objectives assumed in the last MV that affect the nature, objectives and characteristics of the study programme.
- Non-compliance with commitments in the criteria on: academic staff, material resources and support services and learning results.

5.2.3. Multi-Centre study programmes

The external assessment reports distinguish between the qualitative assessments of each faculty where the study programme is taught. The quantitative assessment mentioned in section 4.2 is unique and corresponds to that of the centre with the lowest assessment.

In accordance with CURSA, study programmes taught in several centres of the same university may obtain an Interim Report with aspects that must necessarily be modified in order to obtain a favourable report, due to deficiencies detected in a centre where the study programme is taught. In order to obtain a favourable final report, modifications may include the disassociation of the programme from the centre where the deficiencies occurred. In this case, the university undertakes to modify the syllabus in order to exclude the centre from the study programme.

5.3. Ex-post accreditation evaluation

5.3.1. Information on which the evaluation is based

AQIB assesses the criteria and guidelines described in the previous sections based on the following information:

- The last verified report.
- Verification/modification reports issued by ANECA.
- The annual internal follow-up reports of the study programme.
- The external follow-up reports carried out by AQIB.
- Where applicable, the ex-post accreditation reports.
- The University's Self-Assessment Report.
- Evidence and indicators obtained from the SIGC, as well as information from the Integrated University Information System (SIIU).
- Certification reports on the implementation of the SIGC.
- Reports on the certification process of the models for the evaluation of the teaching activity of university teaching staff.
- The Evidence of Visit (EV) drawn up by the Panel appointed by AQIB after the visit to the university.

All this information is part of the dossier for accreditation:

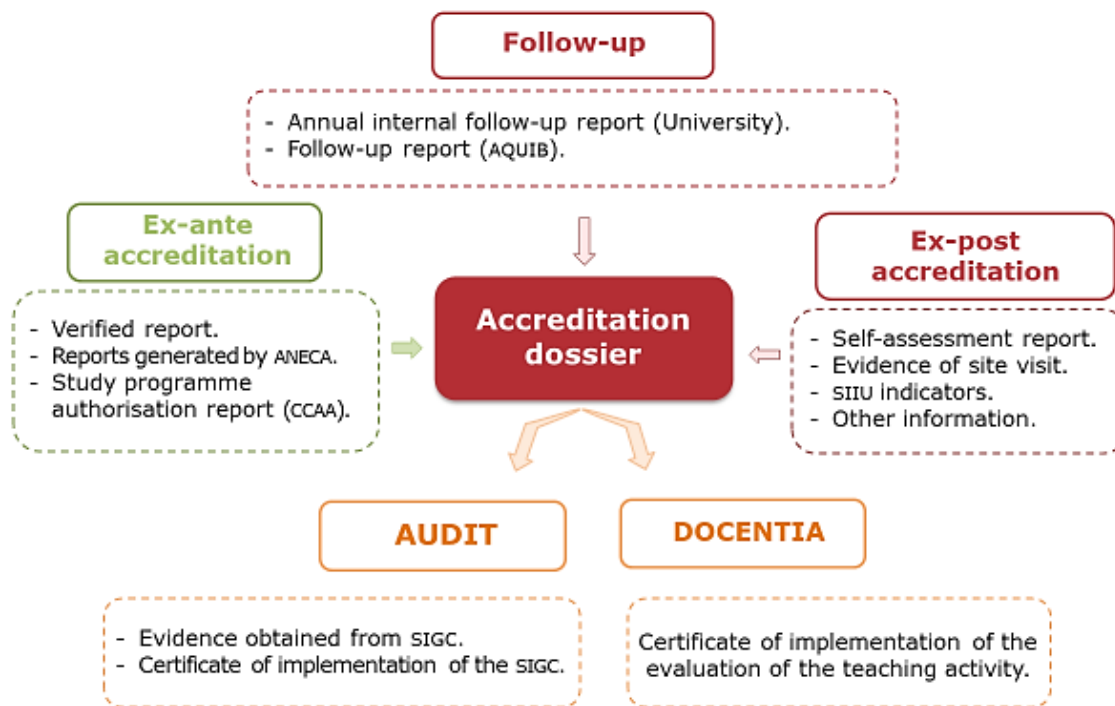


Figure 3. Accreditation dossier

5.3.2. Assessment procedure for ex-post accreditation

The purpose of this process is to describe the activities that the agents involved in the process put into practice. Its ultimate aim is to guarantee transparency in the development of the procedure for the assessment of official university courses submitted for ex-post accreditation.

In the case of inter-university study programmes, renewal is carried out by the agency designated by the Autonomous Community in which the university responsible for the study programmes is located. This university is administratively responsible and is in charge of the initial processing of the verified report. Therefore, it is the one that receives all correspondence and notifications concerning the processing of the programme. This university does not necessarily have to coincide with the coordinating university, as in some cases, coordination may rotate between universities from time to time. The responsible university must notify the information

on this assessment process to the other universities participating in the study programme.

This procedure is carried out in accordance with the following steps:

- **Start.** The university must process the application to the Council of Universities through the corresponding application of the Ministry responsible for universities.
- **Planning.** The university submitting the application for renewal agrees with AQUIB on the planning of the accreditation process and the timetable for the visits of the Panels of external experts to the study programmes, in order to comply with the deadlines of the administrative procedure.

If deemed necessary, the composition of the Panels can be challenged by following the procedure published on the website of AQUIB.

- **Self-assessment report (IA).** The university prepares an IA for each study programme and sends it together with the rest of the documents in the accreditation dossier, prior to the site visit, to AQUIB. In this report, the university justifies that the results obtained by the study programme comply with the objectives for which it was designed. The structure of the report is detailed in the *Self-Assessment Guide for ex-post accreditation of official university studies*.

Finally, prior to the visit, the university must make the IA public to the groups involved in the university community in order to gather opinions about its content.

- **Site visit of the Panel of external experts and its certificate.** AQUIB sends the proposed agenda for the site visit to the university for its consensus. If deemed appropriate, the Panel of experts may request additional information from the university prior to the visit. Likewise, the selection of the reference subjects (bachelor's and master's degrees) or PhD student records is also requested.

AQUIB provides the support platform for the evaluator as an aid to the preliminary assessment of the degree and to the elaboration of the Evidence of Visit (EV).

The site visit consists of meetings with the different stakeholders involved in the study programme. Its purpose is to contrast, evidence and/or complete the information provided by the university. Likewise, during the site visit, detailed information can be consulted on the degree's reference subjects (bachelor's or master's degree) or PhD student records; other additional evidence requested; and, if applicable, the

information collected in the suggestions box. If deemed appropriate, site visits are made to the facilities of the corresponding faculty or centre.

Finally, the Panel of experts draws up a consensual EV for each of the programmes assigned. At the end of this process, a certificate of the visit is issued by AQUIB and sent to the university so that it can submit it together with the application for the ex-post accreditation.

- **Start of the administrative file and submission of the application.** After the external assessment visit - in accordance with the procedure determined by the Autonomous Community - the university submits the application for the renewal of the programmes's accreditation to the Council of Universities, through the corresponding application of the Ministry responsible for universities, in accordance with the deadline and procedure established by the legislation in force.

The period for a decision by the Council of Universities - referred to in article 34.2 of Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance - may not exceed six months and starts to run from the date of submission of the application.

- **Provisional report on the renewal of accreditation.** When the application is received by AQUIB, the Agency's CET analyses the assessment of the Panel of external experts, which is reflected in the EV, together with the rest of the documentation in the dossier. This Commission draws up a proposal for a report, which constitutes the provisional ex-post accreditation Report (IPA). This must always be reasoned, and may include aspects for improvement. The IPA may also:
 - Be in favour of the renewal of accreditation.
 - Contain aspects that necessarily need to be modified in order to obtain a favourable report.
- **Written response to the Provisional Reports and/or improvement actions.** The IPA is sent to the university so that, within 20 working days, it can present the allegations it deems appropriate. Under no circumstances may new evidence not included in the IA or provided during the site visit be submitted. The university may also include an improvement plan for those aspects reflected in the provisional report.
- **Final ex-post accreditation report (IFA).** The CET is responsible for analysing any possible allegations. In addition, this committee, where appropriate, assesses whether the improvement plan makes it possible to remedy the deficiencies found,

taking into account the impact of the deficiency/s mentioned in the Provisional Report on the quality of the study programme.

Subsequently, the CET prepares the IFA, in terms of favourable or unfavourable to the renewal of the accreditation of the degree. The university, within a maximum period of 20 working days, may lodge an appeal against this report, which is resolved by AQUIB's Guarantee Commission.

The AQUIB sends the IFA to the university, the Council of Universities, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Autonomous Community.

- **Resolution.** In accordance with article 34.7 of Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, the Council of Universities issues the corresponding resolution, after receiving the Agency's report. If the report is favourable, a favourable resolution is issued. Otherwise, a decision rejecting the renewal of accreditation is issued. Once the deadlines have elapsed without the corresponding resolution having been issued, the sense of the administrative silence is favourable.

The Universities Council notifies the applicant university of the decision within three working days of its approval, and also notifies the Autonomous Community, the Agency involved in the procedure and the Ministry responsible for university matters. Once the procedure has been completed, the University Council notifies the resolution of the accreditation renewal procedure to the RUCT, in order to include the favourable or unfavourable renewal of the accreditation in the degree's dossier.

In the event that a study programme does not renew its accreditation, the programme is declared extinct, and an entry to this effect is made in the RUCT. As a consequence, the competent Autonomous Community determines the progressive extinction of its curriculum, on an annual basis, from the academic year following that in which the aforementioned decision was taken. Likewise, its definitive extinction must be declared when this occurs for the purposes of its registration in the RUCT. In any case, both the Autonomous Community and the university, within the scope of their respective competences, must adopt the appropriate measures to guarantee the academic rights of the students who are studying these courses.

- **Appeal.** According to Article 34 of Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, the university involved may lodge a complaint with the

President of the Council of Universities (CU) within 15 working days of receiving the resolution of the CU, which will be processed in accordance with the procedure established in Article 26, section 10, of the aforementioned Royal Decree.

The CU - through the corresponding commission - is the body that can ratify the resolution or accept the complaint. If it deems it appropriate, it may refer it to AQUIB, indicating specifically the aspects of the evaluation that need to be reviewed. In this case, the Agency's Guarantees Commission reviews the aspects indicated by the CU and issues the corresponding report.

Once the CU has sent the report, this body issues the final decision. The maximum period for the entire review process is three months, counting from the filing of the complaint. This resolution exhausts the administrative channels and is communicated to the university, the Autonomous Community, AQUIB and the Ministry responsible for higher education. In the absence of an express decision within the aforementioned period, the complaint may be considered rejected.

- **Meta-evaluation.** Analogous to the follow-up process, once the ex-post accreditation programme for the period in question has been completed, AQUIB analyses its evolution and results. To this end, the opinion of the main agents involved is considered: the CET, the Panels of experts, the persons responsible for quality at the institutions assessed and, if resources are available, the Guarantees Commission. In addition, satisfaction surveys are systematically carried out with the assessors (Commission and Panel of experts), the results of which are taken into account in the assessment of the process. With the results and main conclusions of the meta-evaluation of the accreditation renewal process, AQUIB draws up a report.

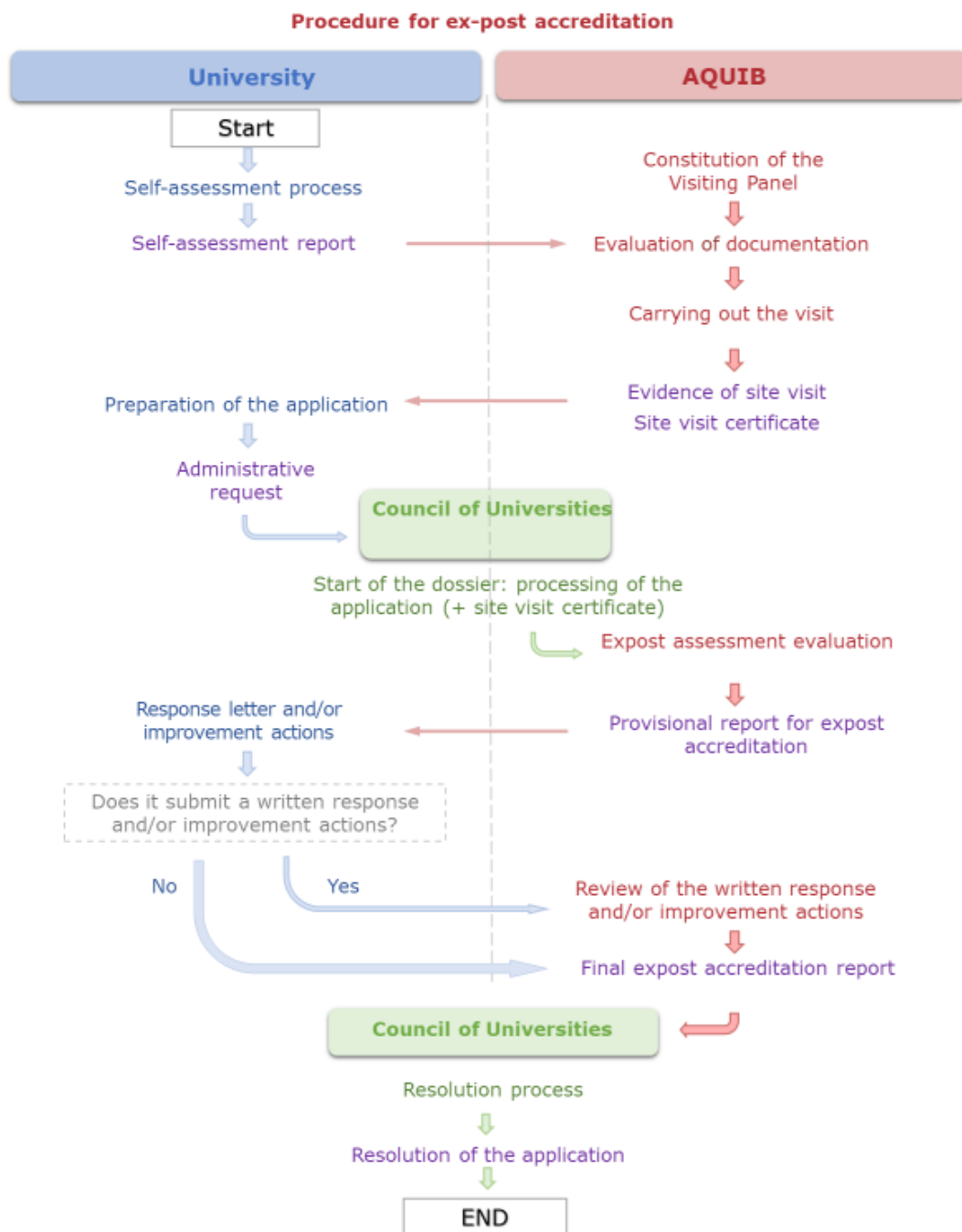


Figure 4. Ex-post accreditation procedure.

6. RELATION BETWEEN EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAMMES

6.1. The ex-post accreditation programme and the internal quality system certification programme: AUDIT

The programme for the renewal of accreditation of official university education has elements in common with the AUDIT programme. The AUDIT programme evaluates the quality assurance systems of universities. However, the scope of the two programmes is different, since the former focuses on study programmes and their individual quality assurance systems, while the latter focuses on the quality assurance systems of universities. However, the analysis of the two programmes reveals some common aspects.

Obtaining an AUDIT certificate is associated with an audit report, which reflects the assessment of the different aspects of the Internal Quality Assurance System implemented in the centre in question. Holding this certificate enables institutional accreditation by centre, which is carried out once every six years and allows for the automatic renewal of the accreditation of all qualifications belonging to the accredited centre.

The content of this report is also taken into consideration in the process of renewing the individual accreditation of the institution's study programmes - in the event that institutional accreditation is not carried out. As a general rule, the guidelines of the ex-post accreditation programme related to the effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance System are not subject to a new evaluation by the commissions that visit the centres on the occasion of the aforementioned ex-post accreditation, focusing their evaluation on the results of the training programme.

However, if, through different sources of information, incidents are detected in the degrees taught at the institution, the criteria of the ex-post accreditation model that are affected could be evaluated.

6.2. The ex-post accreditation programme and the DOCENTIA programme

According to the DOCENTIA programme, the evaluation of teaching activity is conceived as part of a system developed by an institution to guarantee the quality of the curricula it delivers.

In DOCENTIA, the assessment of the teaching activity is understood as the systematic evaluation of the teaching staff's performance, considering their professional role and their contribution to achieving the objectives of the study programme in which they are involved, depending on the institutional context in which they work. Consequently, the evaluation of teaching activity must be understood as an internal evaluation that the university carries out on its teaching staff to guarantee the fulfilment of the objectives of the courses it teaches.

During the DOCENTIA certification process, the different aspects of the Teaching Quality Assessment System implemented at the faculty are assessed and reflected in the assessment report. In addition, its content is taken into account in the process of renewing the accreditation of the centre's study programmes.

Thus, the guidelines of the ex-post accreditation programme related to teaching planning, teaching development and the results focused on the assessment of the quality of the teaching activity are not assessed by the commissions during the visit carried out for the renewal of the accreditation of the faculty's study programmes. However, these guidelines can be evaluated if, through the different sources of information, incidents are detected in the degrees taught at the faculty.

6.3. The ex-post accreditation programme and the international quality seals

In addition to the ex-post accreditation programme, ANECA international quality seals are also being launched. These offer the possibility of obtaining international seals of recognised prestige in sectorial areas closely linked to the exercise of professions, in the same process of renewing the accreditation of the study programme.

Specifically, official bachelor's and master's degree courses in the fields of engineering, computer science or chemistry may apply for the EUR-ACE[®], EURO-INF or EUROLABEL of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE), the European Quality Assurance Network for Education in Informatics

(EQANIE) and the *European Chemistry Thematic Network Association* (ECTN), respectively.

In order to obtain the aforementioned seals, it is necessary to comply with the international standards set by the ENAEE, EQANIE and ECTN organisations, in addition to the requirement to obtain a favourable resolution for the degree's ex-post accreditation.

ANNEX I. RELATION BETWEEN THE LEARNING EVALUATION PROGRAMMES AND THE 2015 ESG

Relation between the dimensions to be assessed in the follow-up and ex-post accreditation programmes for the accreditation of Higher Official Degrees of AQUIB and the Criteria and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Programmes for the evaluation of teaching (AQUIB)		ESG 2015
DIMENSION 1. MANAGEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME	<p>1.1. Quality assurance policy: Institutions should have a public quality assurance policy that is part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, involving external stakeholders.</p> <p>1.2. Programme design and approval: Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their study programmes. Programmes should be designed in such a way that they meet the objectives set for them, including the expected learning results. The qualification of a programme should be clearly specified and publicly available and should refer to the exact level of the national higher education qualifications framework and thus to the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework.</p> <p>1.4. Admission, progression, recognition and certification of students: Institutions should consistently apply pre-established and public standards covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. admission, progression, recognition and certification of students.</p> <p>1.8. Public information: institutions should publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information on their activities and programmes.</p> <p>1.9. Continuous follow-up and regular evaluation of programmes: Institutions should regularly follow-up and evaluate their programmes to ensure that they achieve their objectives and respond to the needs of students and society. Such evaluations should lead to continuous programme improvement. As a consequence, any measures planned or taken should be communicated to all stakeholders.</p>	
DIMENSION 2. RESOURCES	<p>1.5. Teaching staff: Institutions should ensure the competence of their teaching staff. They should also use fair and transparent processes for recruitment and staff development.</p> <p>1.6. Learning resources and student support: institutions should be adequately funded to develop teaching and learning activities, and ensure that sufficient and easily accessible learning support and resources are made available to students.</p>	

DIMENSION 3. RESULTS

Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment: institutions should ensure that programmes are delivered in ways that encourage students to be actively involved in creating the learning process and that evaluation reflects this student-centred approach.

Information management: institutions must ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

1.9. Continuous follow-up and regular evaluation of programmes: Institutions should regularly follow-up and evaluate their programmes to ensure that they achieve their objectives and respond to the needs of students and society. Such evaluations should lead to continuous programme improvement. As a consequence, any measures planned or taken should be communicated to all stakeholders.

1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance: institutions should undergo a cyclical quality assurance process in line with the ESG.

ANNEX II. MAIN CHANGES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS VERSIONS

Version 0 (Pilot project)	Version 1 (13/01/2014)
<p>SECTION 3. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA</p> <p>The wording of guideline 3.2. was: "The SIGC implemented facilitates the process of follow-up, modification and accreditation of the degree and guarantees its continuous improvement based on the analysis of objective data".</p> <p>The wording of guideline 5.5 was: "In the case that the degree includes compulsory external placements, these have been planned as foreseen and are adequate for the acquisition of the degree competences".</p>	<p>SECTION 3. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA</p> <p>The wording of Guideline 3.2. remains: "The implemented SIGC facilitates the process of follow-up, modification and accreditation of the degree and guarantees its continuous improvement based on the analysis of objective and verifiable data".</p> <p>The wording of Guideline 5.5 remains: "In the case that the degree includes external placements, these have been planned as foreseen and are adequate for the acquisition of the degree competences".</p>
<p>SECTION 4. ASSESSMENT OF CRITERIA</p> <p>Semi-quantitative rating scale: In the pilot project the labels for each category of the rating scale were as follows:</p> <p>A. Excellently achieved: the criterion or guideline is consistently and exemplarily met in all aspects that can be assessed.</p> <p>B. Achieved: The criterion or guideline is met for all aspects to be assessed on a regular basis, although there is room for minor improvement.</p> <p>C. Partially achieved: the criterion or guideline is met in most of the aspects to be assessed, but not in all, and there is clearly room for significant improvement.</p> <p>D. Not achieved: the criterion or guideline is not met for most of the aspects to be assessed. There is hardly any indicative evidence of compliance.</p> <p>Criteria passing requirements. The wording of this section was:</p> <p>In order to achieve the renewal of accreditation, it is essential to obtain a rating of "achieved" in the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic staff. - Support staff, material resources and services. - Learning results. <p>The above does not exclude that, depending on the nature of the degree and its teaching-learning modality, the identification of serious deficiencies in other criteria may lead to the issuing of an unfavourable report.</p>	<p>SECTION 4. ASSESSMENT OF CRITERIA</p> <p>Semi-quantitative rating scale: after the development of the pilot project, the definition of the values of the rating scale agreed within REACU changes:</p> <p>A. Excellently achieved: the standard corresponding to the criterion is fully achieved and, in addition, it is an example that exceeds the basic requirements.</p> <p>B. Achieved: the standard corresponding to the criterion is fully achieved.</p> <p>C. Partially achieved: the standard is achieved at the minimum level, but specific areas for improvement are identified.</p> <p>D. Not achieved: The criterion does not achieve the minimum level required to reach the corresponding standard.</p> <p>Criteria passing requirements. The final wording is as follows:</p> <p>In no case can accreditation be achieved if a rating of "not achieved" is obtained in any of the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic staff. - Material resources and student support. - Learning results. <p>The above does not exclude that, depending on the nature of the degree and its teaching-learning modality, the identification of serious deficiencies in other criteria may lead to the issuing of an unfavourable report. A section 4.3. is included which explains the particularities of the assessment of degrees taught in various university centres.</p>

SECTION 5.2. EX-POST ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

The different phases are modified. The main new features are:

- The elimination of the Provisional Site Visit Report and the 10-day observation phase. The Report of the site visit will be unique.
- In order to submit the application for the ex-post accreditation to the Autonomous Communities, the university will have to submit a certificate of completion of the site visit by the accreditation body.

SECTION 6. RELATION BETWEEN THE ACREDITA PROGRAMME AND OTHER PROGRAMMES

- The relationship between follow-up programmes and ACREDITA is explained more clearly.
- The guidelines that will not be subject to assessment in ACREDITA are extended if the centre where a degree is taught has the certificate of implementation of the SIGC through the AUDIT programme.

Version 2 (15/12/2016)

- The reference to the sixth transitory provision of RD 1393/2007, which provides for the extension of the period applicable for the renewal of accreditation, is deleted.
- References to the ACREDITA programme of ANECA are eliminated, given the termination of the collaboration agreement between ANECA and AQUIB.
- The text is simplified and various corrections are made.

SECTION 5.2. EX-POST ACCREDITATION EVALUATION PROCEDURE

- The publication of the Autonomous Community's call for the renewal of degree accreditation is generalised.
- Duplications with other programme documents are eliminated.
- A brief description of the visit is included.
- Explicit mention is made of the Commission for the ex-post Accreditation of AQUIB.

ANNEX II. Relation between the ex-post Accreditation programme and the ENQA Criteria

- Update of the ENQA criteria according to the latest version approved by the Conference of Ministers in May 2015, and review of the relation with the ex-post Accreditation programme of the AQUIB.

Version 3 (15/12/2017)

- Reference is made to Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29 May, on the creation, recognition, authorisation and accreditation of universities and university centres.
- The option for AQUIB to send the Site Visit Report to the university within 15 days is eliminated.
- ANNEX I. Criteria and guidelines for assessment in the ex-post Accreditation Programme is included and removed from the body of the document.
- The text is simplified and various corrections are made.

Version 4 (21/12/2018)

- The scope of the framework document is extended to the life cycle of official university education.
- The process of verification/modification of official university courses is detailed as an input to the follow-up and ex-post accreditation processes carried out by the AQUIB.
- The process of follow-up official university education is detailed and the levels and results of evaluation are defined, in a similar way to those of the ex-post accreditation process.
- The meta-evaluation phase is established in the follow-up and ex-post accreditation processes.
- The Ex-post Accreditation Commission (CRAC) is replaced by the Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET), extending its functions to all the assessment processes of official university courses carried out by the AQUIB.
- The figure of the Commission of Guarantees of the AQUIB (CG) is defined, which acts mainly when appeals are submitted to the Agency in degree evaluation processes.
- ANNEXES III and IV, which established the relationship of the Ex-post Accreditation Programme with the AUDIT and DOCENTIA programmes, respectively, are eliminated, given that the scope of the latter has been modified by ANECA during 2018, adapting them to the 2015 ESG. In this regard, the wording of sections 6.2 and 6.3 is revised.
- A general revision of the drafting is carried out and various corrections are made.

Version 5 (20/12/2019)

- The deadline established by AQUIB for the university to present allegations and/or an improvement plan in response to the provisional external evaluation reports, both in follow-up and in the ex-post accreditation, is modified from 20 calendar days to 20 working days.
- Various corrections are made.

Version 6 (14/09/2023)

- The content is adapted to Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance.
- The content of the document is harmonised with the *Self-Assessment Guide for the ex-post accreditation of official university bachelor's and master's degree courses* and with the *Evaluation Protocol for the follow-up and ex-post accreditation of official university bachelor's and master's degree courses* drawn up by REACU. Reformulating the nomenclature and wording of some of the criteria.
- The content is merged with the documents *External Evaluation guide: the evaluation by the Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET)* and the *External assessment guide: the visit of the panel of experts*.
- The wording of each of the items of the semi-quantitative rating scale (A, B, C and D) is reworded for a better understanding of each of its elements.
- A general revision of the drafting is carried out, and various corrections are made. During the drafting of the document, attention has been paid to the use of inclusive language.