

External evaluation guide for the follow-up of official university programmes

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Published by: Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Guide adopted by the Criteria Commission at its meeting of November 28, 2024.

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Table of acronyms and abbreviations

Note that all acronyms and abbreviations come from its Spanish translation.

ANECA	National Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation
AQUIB	Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
CET	Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation
CURSA	University Commission for the Regulation of Follow-up and Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEES	European Higher Education Area
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 study programmes 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 the evaluation agencies of the autonomous communities registered in the European Register of Quality Agencies (EQAR)¹.

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 in the Balearic Islands, processes specifically regulated by Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance. To this end, the Agency has prepared this guide based on the protocol established by the University Commission for the Follow-up regulation and Accreditation (CURSA), which aims to assist the members of the Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET), the body ultimately responsible for the quality assessment of these courses.

The follow-up of study programmes covers the period from implementation to the time when the study programme is to undergo assessment for the renewal of accreditation, and between subsequent accreditation renewals.

AQUIB uses the model established by the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU), based on three dimensions and seven evaluation criteria, for the evaluation of official university courses, and which complies with the CURSA protocol that establishes the following aspects to be analysed in the follow-up process:

- The relevant and pertinent information for students and society in general that the university must make public for each of its study programmes.
- Information on a core set of minimum indicators to facilitate the preparation of

¹ The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

the annual follow-up report.

- The information derived from the assessment of the application of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SIGC), with the identification of the problems encountered and the decisions adopted for their solution.
- Actions taken on the recommendations set out in the verification reports.
- The actions taken in response to the aspects that must necessarily be modified in successive external evaluation processes.

The follow-up process developed in this document should not involve additional work to that usually carried out by the university in the follow-up of its official study programmes, bearing in mind that the aspects to be evaluated form part of the commitments set out in the university's latest verified report.

The university is primarily responsible for the follow-up process of its study programmes and must use the instruments provided for in its Internal Quality Assurance System (SIGC), while AQUIB acts as an external evaluation agent with the aim of guaranteeing quality in the provision of higher education services. The follow-up process of official university education is intended to be a significant element in the strategy of continuous improvement of the quality of higher university education. The general evaluation procedure for the follow-up of study programmes is detailed in the programme's *Framework Document* available on the website of AQUIB².

² Website available at <https://www.aquib.es/es>

2. PURPOSES OF THE FOLLOW-UP

The follow-up process for official study programmes is aimed at:

- **Ensuring the effective execution of the courses** in accordance with the curriculum of the study programme implemented, as stated in the RUCT together with the amendments approved by the Council of Universities and authorised, where applicable, by the Autonomous Communities.
- **Ensuring 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** during the implementation of the curriculum.
- **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.

Likewise, and in general terms, the follow-up aims to show progress in the development of the study programme's SIGC, both in terms of reviewing the application of the curriculum and proposing actions to improve its design and implementation. The follow-up process of official university education provides relevant information to analyse, in a global manner, the degree of adaptation of the university system to the European Higher Education Area (EES).

3. EVALUATION PROTOCOL

On an annual basis, AQUIB establishes the study programmes subject to external follow-up and agrees with the university the deadlines for the follow-up process. Specifically, it determines the delivery of the university's annual follow-up and assessment reports (IAS) and the sending of the provisional (IPS) and final follow-up reports (IDS).

The date of submission of the IAS for each study programme to AQUIB marks the start of the follow-up process for the period in question. The Agency distributes the evaluations among the members of the CET after consultation, if necessary, with the chair of the corresponding subcommission.

3.1 Preliminary analysis of the study programme documentation

AQUIB makes the complete dossier of the study programme available to the assigned CET assessors via the corresponding IT support platform, including the IAS prepared by the university.

In case the **study programme has renewed its accreditation**, the CET reviews:

- The status of the requirements and aspects subject to special attention in the final ex-post accreditation report (IFA) and indicate this in the corresponding criterion. If in any criterion there are neither requirements nor aspects subject to special attention in future evaluations of the study programme, it must be indicated as *Not applicable*. However, in the event of identifying any non-compliance that had not been detected in previous external evaluations, these should also be assessed.
- If the university responds to suggestions for improvement (or recommendations) from previous evaluations in its improvement plan, these are also assessed.
- In the case of study programmes that envisage an amendment after the ex-post accreditation, the amendment must also be evaluated in the corresponding criterion, indicating its state of implementation.

In the case of study programmes that **have not yet undergone a ex-post accreditation process**, the CET carried out a full evaluation of the criteria.

Each individual evaluator carries out an initial evaluation using the individual pre-evaluation template. Depending on their characteristics, they respond to certain evaluation criteria - described in detail in the *Self-Assessment Guide for ex-post accreditation of official bachelor's and master's degree courses* - which, in general, are as follows:

- The determination of the effective development of the teaching corresponds to the academic members, who assess the criteria: (1) *Organisation and development*; (4) *Academic staff*; (5) *Support staff, material resources and services*; and (7) *Satisfaction and performance indicators*. In doctoral programmes, only criteria (1), (4) and (7)³ are evaluated.
- The relevance of public information is checked by the student member, who evaluates criterion (2) *Information and transparency*.
- The effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance System is verified by the quality spokesperson (SIGC), who assesses the criterion (3) *Internal Quality Assurance System*.

The assessment levels applied for each criterion are as follows:

Compliance achieved, differentiated where appropriate into:

- Excellently achieved (A) when no deficiencies have been detected, the curriculum development excels in its field and relevant good practices are identified.
- Achieved (B):
 - When the development of the curriculum is found to be in accordance with the plan, without any deficiencies being detected in its development.
 - When the requirements or aspects identified as requiring special attention in previous external evaluation reports have been addressed.
- Partially achieved (C):
 - When deficiencies are detected in the development of the curriculum. These require the implementation of improvement actions.

³ Criterion (6) is not evaluated in AQUIB's follow-up programme.

- 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 non-compliances are detected in the commitments made in the last verified report (MV) of the curriculum or in previous external evaluations.

3.2 Preparation of the provisional Follow-up Report (IPS)

AQUIB compiles the individual ex-ante assessments and makes them available to the CET rapporteur. The rapporteur drafts the IPS based on the individual pre-assessments on the IT support platform provided by the Agency. AQUIB then organises a meeting - usually in a virtual format - where the draft is presented and the most relevant aspects, as well as discrepant points, are discussed.

The IPS must be well-reasoned and should include an introduction, an assessment of each of the criteria evaluated, which may incorporate requirements, aspects to be given particular attention in future external evaluations, suggestions for improvement, and good practices, along with a semi-quantitative assessment (A, B, C, D). Based on the ratings assigned to each criterion, the overall result in the IPS may be:

- Favourable.
- Favourable with aspects to be given particular attention in future external evaluations of the programme.
- With aspects that necessarily need to be modified in order to obtain a favourable report.

For the purposes of this procedure, the follow-up result **is not considered directly favourable** when the following is identified:

- Non-compliance with clear commitments and objectives assumed in the verified report, or in its subsequent amendments, in terms of academic staff, support services and infrastructures.
- Serious deficiencies identified in the ex-post accreditation process remain uncorrected.

- Lack of annual follow-up report of the study programme.

3.2.1 University response to the provisional follow-up report (IPS)

The chair of the corresponding subcommission signs the IPS and sends it to the university. The university has 20 working days to submit objections, an improvement plan, or a response letter.

Within the same timeframe, if the IPS identifies aspects that must necessarily be amended to achieve a favourable IDS, the university must submit an improvement plan. If the report highlights aspects requiring particular attention in future external evaluations of the programme, the university must provide either a statement of commitment or an improvement plan addressing these aspects.

3.3 Analysis of the response letter and/or improvement plan and elaboration of the Final follow-up Report (IDS)

The letter of response issued by the university to AQUIB in reference to the IPS is sent to the study programme course lecturer. The latter, in accordance with the review of the university's letter, drafts the IDS on the IT support platform provided by the Agency. If allegations have been submitted, their acceptance must be assessed and, if required, the necessary corrections must be made. In addition, regarding the response to the aspects that must necessarily be amended and corrected, the commitments made by the university must be stated in each criterion of the report. AQUIB sends the draft of the IDS, together with the university's response, to the participating evaluators for final approval.

The IDS should maintain the original text, except where the allegations submitted justify a modification. Therefore, aspects requiring particular attention in future evaluations, suggestions for improvement, and good practices must be preserved in the IDS, while aspects from the IPS that need to be amended will be reflected as requirements. If the university submits an improvement plan, the report must acknowledge the commitment made by the university. Additionally, aspects that have been resolved may be removed, provided this is clearly documented in the justification for the corresponding criterion.

Once the allegations and the improvement plan presented by the university have

been reviewed, if applicable, the overall assessment of the follow-up of the study programme may be as follows:

- Favourable.
- Favourable with aspects for special attention in future external evaluation processes⁴.
- Unfavourable.

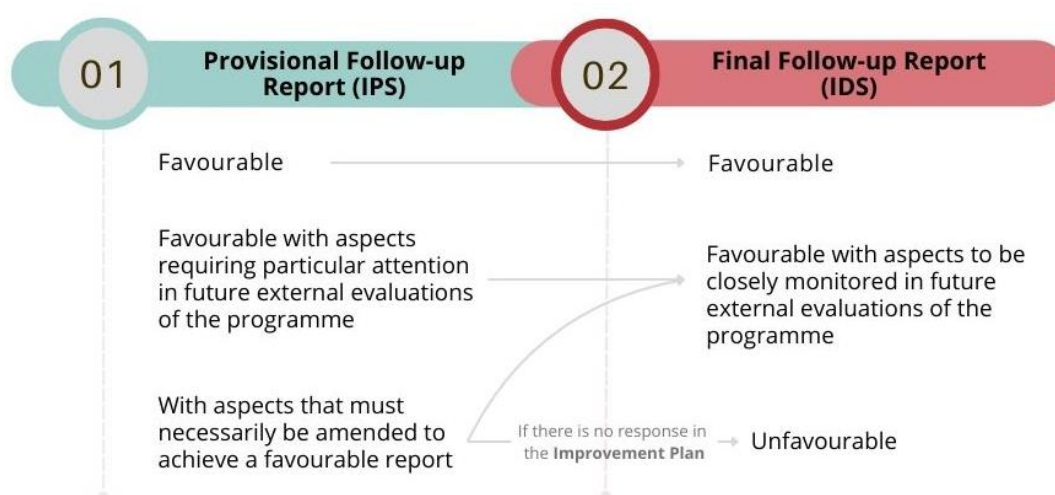


Figure 1. Summary of IPS and IDS' results

The Agency may consider the possibility of conducting additional follow-up in cases deemed unfavourable or where —depending on the nature of the programme and the teaching-learning modality— serious deficiencies are identified in other criteria.

According to Royal Decree 822/2021, if the follow-up report identifies serious breaches of the commitments outlined in the programme's study plan, the quality assurance agency will report these findings to the governing bodies of the faculty and the university. It will also inform the Autonomous Community, so that appropriate measures can be taken to safeguard the educational interests of the students. This may, where applicable, result in the termination of the programme.

⁴ The IDS will be given this assessment if the IPS identifies aspects that must necessarily be amended to achieve a favourable report and the university commits to addressing them in its response letter and improvement plan, or if there are aspects requiring particular attention in future external evaluation processes.

4. ROLES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CET IN THE FOLLOW-UP OF STUDY PROGRAMMES

The follow-up evaluation panel is made up of the following members of the CET, whose functions are detailed below:

- The chairperson of the corresponding study programme evaluation subcommission, depending on the branch of knowledge of the study programme.
- Two academic members from the branch of knowledge of the study programme, one person designated as rapporteur and the other as reviewer.
- One student member.
- A quality spokesperson.

Chairperson

- Coordinate the Commission's meetings.
- Collaborate with the secretary in the allocation of speakers for each of the study programmes.
- Participate, at each evaluation session, in collegiate decision-making on the qualifications assigned to the Commission.
- Approve the minutes of the meetings.
- Sign the IPS and IDS.

Secretary

- Draw up a meeting agenda for the commission's meetings.
- Organise the reports to be discussed during the meeting.
- Prepare the necessary documentation.
- Assist the chairperson during meetings.
- Draw up the minutes.

Academic member

- To study and analyse the files assigned for the commission meeting.
- In the case of being appointed as a reviewer, carry out the individual evaluation of the assigned qualifications.
- In the case of being appointed as a rapporteur evaluator, carry out the individual evaluation and prepare the draft IPS and IDS of the assigned study programmes.

- The study of the allegations and/or improvement plans submitted by the University to IPS.
- Participate, at each evaluation session, in collegiate decision-making on the qualifications assigned to the Commission.

Student member

- To review and evaluate the public information on the study programmes being followed-up.
- Study the allegations and/or improvement plans submitted by the University to the IPS.
- Participate, at each evaluation session, in collegiate decision-making on the qualifications assigned to the Commission.

Quality spokesperson

- Carry out a review of the effectiveness of the university's SIGC, especially in terms of the study programmes being followed-up.
- Study the allegations and/or improvement plans submitted by the University to the IPS.
- Participate, at each evaluation session, in collegiate decision-making on the qualifications assigned to the Commission.

ANNEX I. MAIN CHANGES COMPARED TO PREVIOUS VERSIONS

Version 1 (29/11/2019)

- The external follow-up of doctoral programmes is included, with its templates for the preparation of provisional and final follow-up reports.
- The pre-evaluation and report templates are adapted to those established in the AvaTit platform (AQUIB platform for study programme evaluation).
- The deadline set by AQUIB for the University to submit allegations and/or an improvement plan in response to the Provisional Follow-up Report is modified from 20 calendar days to 20 working days.
- Various corrections and modifications are made to the text to make it easier to understand.

Version 2 (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 *evaluation protocol for the follow-up and ex-post accreditation of official university bachelor's and master's study programmes* drawn up by REACU.
- 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.

Version 3 (28/11/2024)

- The content of the IPS is clarified, and the overall evaluation in the IPS is revised by removing the "unfavourable" rating and replacing it with "favourable with aspects to be given particular attention in future external evaluations of the programme".
- It is specified that aspects from the IPS that must necessarily be amended will be reflected as requirements in the IDS, with a clarification included in footnote 4.
- A general review of the wording is conducted, and various corrections are made.