Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
de **Catalunya**

Guide to the self-evaluation of e-learning degree programmes

Guide to the evaluation of degree programmes

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Index

Foreword

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) is responsible for the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality in universities and higher education institutions in Catalonia. Its mission is to promote, through evaluation, the enhancement of quality in the Catalan higher education system within the framework of the European Higher Education Area.

There are two main aims for the institutional evaluation of quality in the universities: to promote the enhancement of quality, and to provide valid and objective information on the service provided to society by universities. Evaluation therefore combines two purposes:

▪ It is intended to be a useful tool to assist degree programmes and institutions in managing and enhancing the quality of university education and, more specifically, to help bring about significant changes in the design of degrees and in the teaching-learning process.

▪ It seeks to provide greater satisfaction in terms of student learning requirements and a better response to social demands by ensuring the effectiveness and efficacy of investment in higher education, and improve the quality of information made available to society on the running of the higher education system.

The fundamental principle impregnating evaluation processes is that the universities, through the exercising of their autonomy, have the primary responsibility for the quality of education and its quality assurance. Furthermore, evaluation processes start with the recognition that it is the institutions themselves that are best qualified to provide updated, reliable and valid information on the quality of their educational processes.

This Guide to THE SELF-EVALUATION OF E-LEARNING DEGREE PROGRAMMES has been drawn up by experts in e-learning education and evaluation methodologies. It consists of an adequacy to the particular characteristics of distance learning of the *Guide to degree programme assessment* used in the PRO-QU programme. It is important to mention that the evaluation methodology in this programme has been used throughout a long period of adjustment (the first evaluations carried out by AQU Catalunya were made more than ten years ago) during which time it has progressively been transformed. The guide presented here is therefore based not just on the current instruments for evaluation used by AQU Catalunya, but also international specifications for the evaluation of this type of degree programmes.

To sum up, the adapted guide is intended to be true to the stated aims of the first evaluation, namely an approach based on enhancement and information to society, through public and transparent evaluation methodologies, for setting in place and accomplishing the goal of the Bologna Declaration for a European dimension to quality assurance.

The evaluation methodology

The evaluation model follows a system based on the European model adapted to the evaluation culture within the university and social context of Catalonia. The various stages of the evaluation process are described below, together with the two envisaged units of analysis, institutional evaluation and degree evaluation.

The evaluation process

The stages in the quality evaluation process are as follows:

1. Self-evaluation

This begins with the gathering and systemisation of information on the unit[1] being evaluated (its actual situation). This information will consist of statistics, administration data and indicators on the inputs, processes and results of the unit's activity. The internal assessment committee's self-evaluation report will incorporate new observations, opinions and appraisals made throughout the process into this information.

The self-evaluation should be seen as a diagnostic process and a starting point for detecting, as objectively and thoroughly as possible, areas of excellence so that these can be recognised and enhanced, as well as detecting areas capable of being improved.

2. External review

An external review panel analyses the self-evaluation report and carries out a site visit to the unit. On the basis of its observations and the information obtained and opinions and appraisals made during contact with the different interviewees, it issues an external report. This report will be submitted for consideration by the unit so it can submit pleas or make any appropriate remarks.

The aim of the external review is to help the degree or institution in making its analysis, i.e. validate the diagnosis made by the internal assessment committee, and also collaborate in identifying possible ways to enhance its quality.

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[1] Hereinafter referred to as the "unit".

3. Evaluation report

A balanced and comprehensive summary of the self-evaluation report and the external report gives rise to the definitive report on the unit (degree programme), which must be disseminated and made public.

This report must have a dual format:

- One meant for external information purposes (to society). Based on the external report and drawn up by AQU Catalunya, this report shall be submitted to the degree for consideration and approved by the AQU Quality Assessment Committee (CAQ). Its content shall be included in the annual report made public by the Agency.

- One meant for the degree community and the university itself. Based on the self-evaluation report and the external report and drawn up by self-evaluation committee, this report contains a summary of the evaluation of the different dimensions, the strong and weak points and essentially the **degree improvement plan**.

4. Improvement plan

In order for quality enhancement to come full cycle, the evaluation, as a fundamental diagnostic tool, must lead to an improvement plan.

An improvement plan is the proposal of actions, resulting from the prior process of diagnosis, which sets out and formalises the goals for improvement and corresponding actions aimed at enhancing the strong points and resolving the weak ones, according to priority and a schedule.

The improvement plan needs to include the design for actions considered appropriate for eliminating or reducing the weaknesses detected in the evaluation. Details of the aims, actions and follow-up indicators, together with those responsible for these being carried out, are several of the requirements of an improvement plan.[2]

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[2] For more details on this subject, see the *General framework for the setting, monitoring and reviewing of improvement plans* (AQU Catalunya, 2005) at: www.aqucatalunya.org.

Diagram 1. The quality assessment spiral

The quality assessment spiral diagram showing: 5. Final application, 0. Actual situation, 1. Internal report, 4. Improvement plan, Statistics / Data / Indicators, Observations / Opinions / Assessments, 2. External report, 3. Final report on unit.
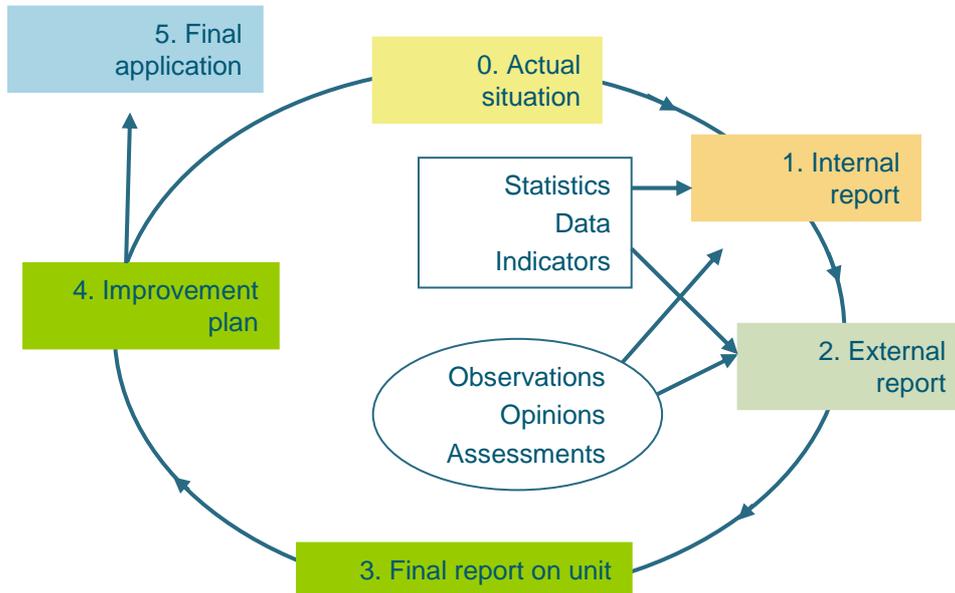
5. Follow up and evaluation of the improvement plan

This stage enables actual changes in the enhancement of quality in the unit to be assessed, and a new cycle of the continuous assessment of quality in the unit is thereby started.

The evaluation process incorporates different approaches: self-evaluation and external review, evaluation based on the judgments of experts, performance indicator-based evaluation, etc. (see table 1).

Table 1. The main features of the AQU Catalunya evaluation methodology

- A combination of self-evaluation (self-evaluation reports) with external review (external experts). The self-evaluation report is the key evidence that serves as the basis for the external review, the aim of which is to validate and assist in improving the diagnosis carried out by the unit itself, and also orientate and advise on the suggested proposals for improvement.

- A combination of performance indicators (outcomes) and input process indicators. Performance indicators are based on input indicators. For example, assessment of the adequacy of academic outcomes will depend on the student profile (entrance exam mark, combination of studies and work, etc.), although aspects on the process (evaluation schedule, group size, strategies used, etc.) will also be considered. At the same time, the main function of the outcome indicators used in the methodology is to guide the quality of the processes, as these can be improved and are the means through which the outcomes can be modified.

- A combination of quantitative and qualitative information. The evidence on which the analysis is based is both quantitative (data, indicators, percentages, etc.) and qualitative (the opinions of the committee, outside experts, students, etc.). The quantitative information is set in context and interpreted by the committees through the combined analysis of different types of evidence.

- Accountability and quality enhancement. As is mentioned in the foreword, there are two combined aims in the evaluation: information to society and the continuous enhancement of quality.

The evaluation unit

As with other projects such as the one dealing with the evaluation of the transition of graduates to the labour market, this evaluation process has a dual structure:

a) One which is centralised and includes all aspects that are common to all degrees (mission, vision, human resource policies, etc.), with special emphasis on the policies and mechanisms of quality assurance, including the information systems to support these mechanisms.
A *Guide to institutional evaluation* is available for the evaluation of these aspects.

b) One that is specific to each degree, which specifies the way in which the aspects, policies and general mechanisms work: adequacy of the learning outcomes, adequacy of the profile and types of teaching staff, etc.
A *Guide to the evaluation of e-learning degree programmes* is available for the evaluation of these aspects.

Two types of committee are consequently defined, an institutional committee and specific committees to evaluate the degree programmes.

Diagram 2. The evaluation units
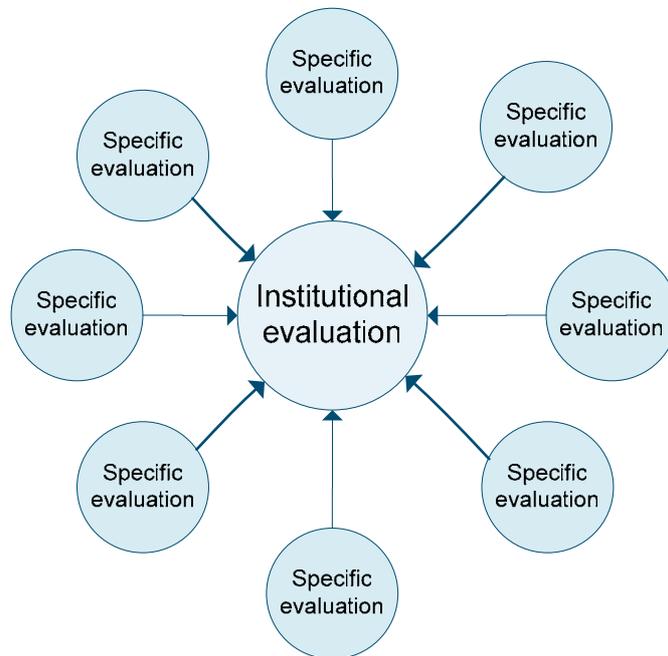
The content of the evaluation

The **institutional evaluation** is organised into three main sections (see table 2):

– The institutional mission and vision, which set out the aims of the institution.

– Envisaged resource management (*inputs*) to achieve the goals: the analysis of the policies covering all the elements that determine the system's potential and capacity (students, teaching staff, etc.).

– The quality assurance mechanisms – including the information systems and their management – for monitoring the achievement of envisaged goals.

Table 2. Content of the institutional evaluation
1. Institutional mission and vision
1.1. Institutional mission
1.2. Institutional vision
2. System capacity
2.1. Students
2.2. Teaching staff
2.3. Infrastructure
2.4. External relations
3. Quality assurance mechanisms
3.1. Institutional vision and mission
3.2. System capacity: students, teaching staff, infrastructure and external relations
3.3. Internal and external strategic position
3.4. Learning outcomes and study programme
3.5. Instruction design
3.6. Learning assessment
3.7. Outcomes: academic, professional and personal

The *Guide to institutional evaluation* deals with the defining of goals and policies, together with an assessment of the relevance of these goals, whereas the *Guide to the evaluation of degree programmes* focuses on assessing the adequacy of different institutional policies, in the light of the results of these processes.

The *Guide to the evaluation of degree programmes* is organised in five sections (see table 3):

- Firstly, the degree programme's potential and soundness are analysed in relation to both the university itself and other similar degree programmes. This analysis includes the adequacy of the student and teaching staff profile in relation to the envisaged goals.

- The study programme, or the learning goals, is then considered.

- The implementation and running of the study programme are then analysed: instruction design (section 3) and learning assessment (section 4).

- Lastly, consideration is given to the outcomes, bearing in mind both the adequacy of resources/inputs (students profile, teaching staff, infrastructure, etc.) and the functioning of the learning processes.

Table 3. Content of the degree evaluation reports

1. The degree's strategic position

1.1. Internal strategic position

1.2. External strategic position

2. Study programme

2.1. Definition of the learning outcomes

2.2. Adequacy of the study programme

3. Instruction design

3.1. Teaching methodology

3.2. Adequacy of the activities

3.3. How the degree is organised

3.4. Student orientation and tutorial system

3.5. Technical set-up for instruction

3.6. Interpersonal communications systems

4. Learning assessment

4.1. Assessment system

5. Outcomes

5.1. Academic outcomes

5.2. Professional outcomes

5.3. Personal outcomes

The self-evaluation

The self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation report is the key piece to the evaluation model that is used and the main evidence in the external review process. In order for it to serve as the basis for a good improvement plan, the self-evaluation report needs to be an accurate and objective diagnosis. Amongst other things, it must comply with the following requirements:

- Complete and rigorous. It must analyse and assess the key elements in the situation that is to be assessed and improved.

- Based on evidence, in order for it to be sound, objective and contestable, and unquestionable.

- Systematic and detailed with regard to the analysis of the causes and anything else that is necessary for dealing with improvements

- Balanced, in terms of both the positive aspects as well as those that need improving.

- It must involve both the stakeholders and the communities affected, in order to ensure their representation in the analysis and therefore the report's thoroughness by including the different points of view.

The self-evaluation committee has the responsibility for drawing up the self-evaluation report and, in accordance with the guidelines given in the Guide, for making it publicly available so it can be validated by the university community and the degree. Once it has been validated, it is made available to the external review panel.

The self-evaluation committees

Two types of internal committee have been established:

1. The self-evaluation committee, which is in charge of drawing up the internal institutional evaluation report. This committee shall be made up of nine members:

   · two vice-rectors,

   · two assistant managers,

   · three directors of studies, and

   · two programme directors.

2. The degree evaluation committee, which is responsible for drawing up the self-evaluation reports as laid down in the *Guide to the evaluation of degree programmes*. This committee shall be made up of the following profiles:

   · the director of studies,

   · the programme directors,

   · teachers,

   · study advisors,

   · the study programme administrator, and

   · at least one graduate from the Open University (UOC) for each degree programme.

Publicity and participation mechanisms

The opinion of the various different stakeholders in the organisation needs to be obtained. Specific information needs to be provided on the degrees that are to be evaluated to ensure that all stakeholders are knowledgeable of the process. The publicising of the self-evaluation report and it being submitted to the relevant bodies (departments, committees, student associations, services, etc.) are essential conditions for the internal validation of the process.

The drafting of the report: the evaluation protocol

Details of the technical aspects and methodology to be taken into consideration when the self-evaluation report is written up are given below. The approach and structure of the evaluation process is meant to make the coincidences and discrepancies of the internal and external

points of view converge in one analytical framework, which will require the use of one protocol by both the internal and external committees.

As can be seen from diagram 3, the protocol is organised as follows:

a) The left-hand page gives the **dimensions to be evaluated**, with a list of indicators and elements that are aspects of quality in relation to the dimension analysed. Assessments here are made on a four-point scale (highly favourable, favourable, satisfactory and unfavourable).

b) The right-hand page gives the **standards** to orientate the committee's value judgment and a list of **evidence** in support of the opinions and appraisals made.

- The **standards** are statements about the level and anticipated quality of the dimension evaluated. This ensures that the evaluation is based on explicit and public criteria.[3]

- **Evidence** may include the data, documents or opinions obtained from different stakeholders, which serve as the basis for, and support or justify value judgments that are made.

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[3] The protocol standards are based on the following sources:

- On the one hand, the specific standards for e-learning education: Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and The cooperative advancing in the effective use of technology in higher education (WCET).
- On the other, the accreditation standards of the degree programmes participating in the EHEA's degree programme pilot testing project, and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (standards for internal quality assurance) adopted in the Bergen Declaration by the ministers responsible for higher education, which from now on will guide the preparation of all assessment and accreditation methodologies in Europe.

Diagram 3. Organisation of the protocol
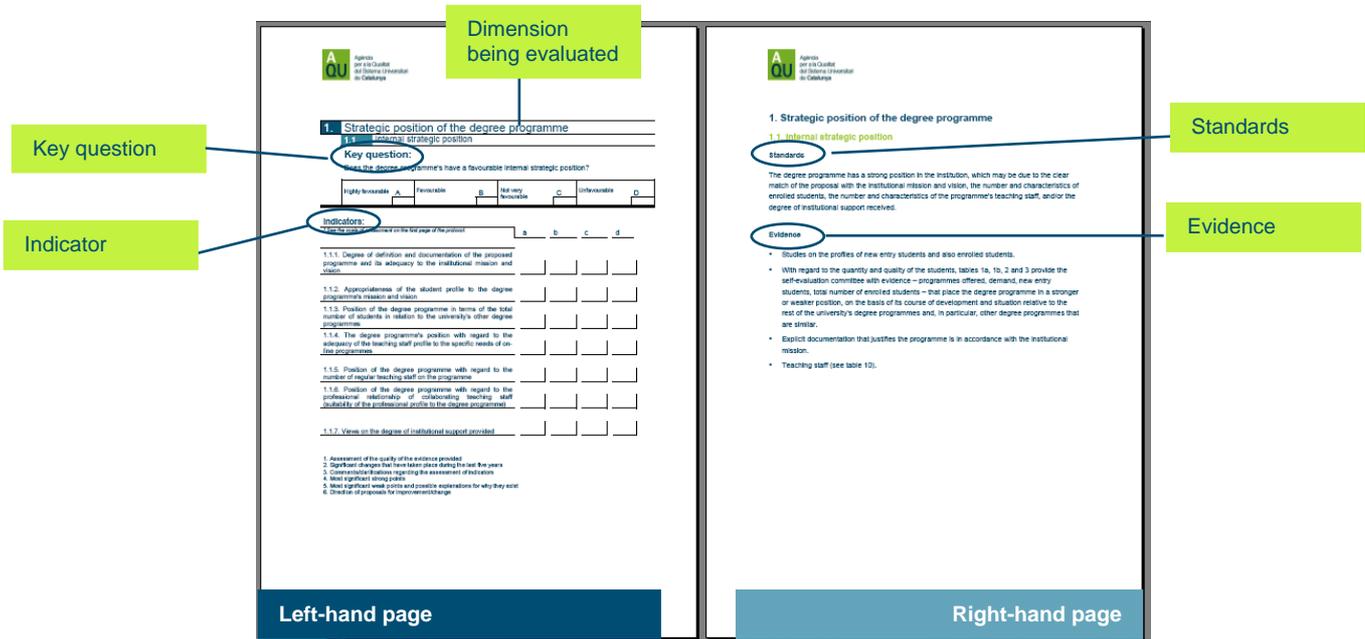
The purpose of this structure, with defined and public data and criteria for the evaluation, is to make the process more rational and reduce the variability of the criteria that serve as the basis for judgments by both the internal and external committees.

The different steps involved in preparing the report are described below:

Diagram 4. Steps to fill out the evaluation protocol
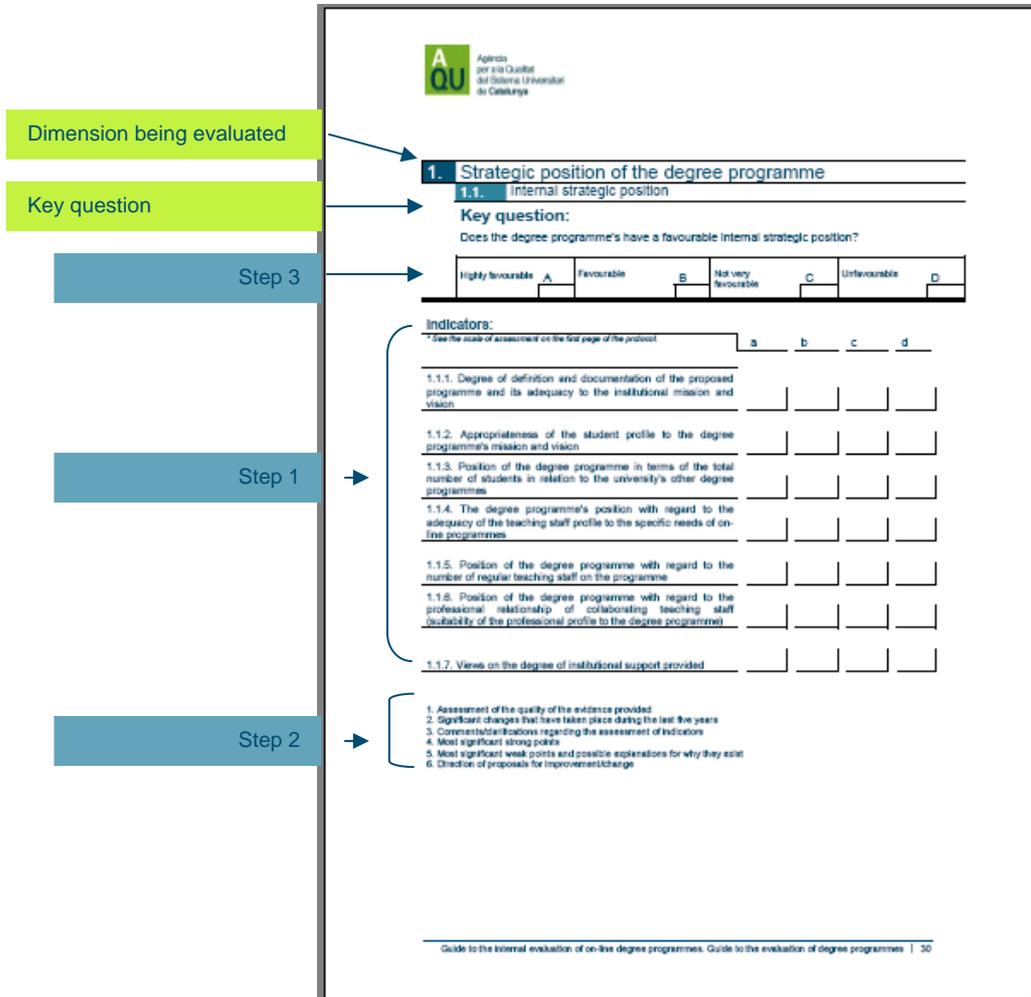
Step 1: Assessment of each indicator in the section

Using the data and evidence available for each indicator, the internal committee[4] makes an assessment according to one of the following value judgments:

a) Highly appropriate / Highly adequate / Highly satisfactory

b) Appropriate / Adequate / Satisfactory

c) Not very appropriate / Not very adequate / Not very satisfactory

d) Inappropriate / Inadequate / Unsatisfactory

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[4] The external panel only makes an assessment of the key question and not each indicator of the dimension evaluated.

When the value judgment that best describes the degree's is made, account needs to be taken of the following:

- The data and evidence provided. In the case of data, trends need to be taken into consideration and, when possible, comparisons with other data made (for example, data on the degree in relation to other degrees in the same subject, etc.).

- The recommended standards.

- The criterion of either the committee itself or the criterion validated by the community being evaluated as the result of a more or less structured consultation process.

Step 2: Overview of the situation

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided:

    For each aspect and section evaluated, the availability and use of evidence serving as the basis for judgments made in step 1 need to be specified.

    An appraisal is also made of the sufficiency, relevance and adequacy of the evidence as a basis for the assessment made.

2. Significant changes during the previous five-year period.

    Given the cyclic character of the evaluation process, any variations – changes – and the most notable improvements that have occurred during the previous five years need to be taken into consideration.

3. Comments on and clarifications of the judgments made:

    This section should include all considerations and remarks not entered in the assessment of the different indicators that describe the situation of a particular aspect or dimension, due to their being adjusted to pre-established benchmarks or criteria.

4. Most significant strong points:

    This section gives a summary of the situations, practices and facts that represent the degree's strong points, with special emphasis on the possibility of ensuring their effect and presence in the medium term.

5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist:

    In the same way, the summary of the weak points and deficiencies that have been observed, together with explanatory hypotheses for their causes, is a compulsory stage if appropriate improvement actions are to be carried out. The diagnosis needs to be accepted by the community as an initial step in order for shortcomings to be reduced and eliminated.

6. The direction of possible proposals for improvement/change:

    Following the analysis of both strong and weak points, this section is for proposals for possible lines of action to be adopted in order to resolve or reduce the weaknesses

detected. This enables an initial assessment to be made of the level of coherency between the current situation and strategies proposed in order to achieve a certain goal.

Step 3: Overall judgment of the section evaluated

The evaluation committees have to give their opinion by way of an overall assessment of each section covered in the guide. This enables both specificity (indicators) and comprehensiveness (sections) to be included and provides an overview of the **quality profile of the degree programme**. Judgments result from two combined criteria: the strength or weakness of the current situation and the organisation's (degree or university) attitude to this situation.

The external review process

The credibility and validity of the self-evaluation report produced by the degree or university need to be confirmed in the external review, which is carried out by a committee of external experts (peer review) or the external review panel. This type of evaluation originated with the programme accreditation committees, the referees of scientific journals and research funding advisers.

The reliability of the experts' judgments, and their validity, is largely conditioned by the evidence (objective information) provided in the self-evaluation report and gathered by the external review panel itself, and also by the methodical use made of the *Guide to the external review*. As is pointed out in the guide, the general aim of the external review is the formulation of value judgments regarding the design, organisation and delivery of learning processes and the outcomes in relation to the units' goals, in order for their quality to be appraised and proposals made for measures for improvement.

The external review has a twofold aim:

- It must serve to guide and orientate institutions and degrees being reviewed in improving the level and quality of study programmes and associated degrees.

- It complies with the need to provide independent and rigorous information to students and society in general, who share an interest in the high quality of higher education.

Composition of the external review panels

Composition and profile of the external review panels

The **external institutional review panel** shall be made up of at least four persons: two academics, one professional and one methodologist. Their qualifications' profiles shall be as follows:

- One professor with extensive experience in teaching, research and administration (of higher education institutions), fundamentally in the Catalan higher education system.

- One expert in e-learning higher education, from a foreign university with prestige in the field of distance learning.

- One professional expert in e-learning education, outside of the scope of the university, with knowledge and experience in ICT application.

- One methodologist with experience in evaluating learning outcomes or institutional quality at the university level, who will act as an intermediary between the external institutional review panel and the external panels that review the degree programmes.

The **external panels that review the degree programmes** shall include the profiles of an academic, a professional and an expert in evaluation methodology, the qualifications' profiles of which are as follows:

- The academic profile shall be represented by a member of senior university teaching and research staff with recognised prestige, preferably from outside the Catalan higher education system. It is advisable for the person to have held a governing position in the university and to therefore be familiar with university administration. Experience in institutional evaluation processes is preferred.

- The professional profile shall be a graduate of the Open University (UOC) who is a professional with experience in the same field of work as the degree being evaluated. In terms of the profile, the professional must provide information on the latest requirements for qualified staff in industry or on professional practice associated with the corresponding degree programmes.

- The profile of the methodologist shall be a person with experience in evaluating learning outcomes or institutional quality at the university level. Knowledge of the field of e-learning education is preferred.

The members of the external review panels are appointed by the AQU Catalunya Management, with the prior knowledge of the degree or university. One of the reviewers holds the position of chairperson of the external panel.

The site visit

The external experts receive training on the virtual campus prior to the visit, so as to be able to make best use of the interviews, and passwords provided so that the virtual campus can be accessed prior to the actual site visit.

The visit is arranged beforehand and it will have a duration of two days. There is an interval of at least three weeks between the time when the self-evaluation report is received and the visit to the institution or unit. The visit itself starts with a meeting of the external review panel on the evening of the first day, the purpose of which is for each member to make an individual appraisal of the self-evaluation report and prepare the contents to be dealt with in each interview to be held. The interviews with the different groups start on the second day. The interviews held by each committee are as follows:

The external institutional review panel carries out interviews with:

1. the self-evaluation committee and/or the Board of Governors,
2. teaching staff,
3. technical staff,

4. studies communication and administration, and

5. directors of studies.

The external panels reviewing the degrees carry out interviews with:

1. the self-evaluation committee (face-to-face),

2. students (on-line),

3. teaching assistants: advisers and tutors (on-line),

4. graduates (face-to-face),

5. teaching staff on the degree programme itself (face-to-face), and

6. academic managers of the degree programme: directors of studies and programmes (face-to-face).

In both cases the visit ends with a meeting with the self-evaluation committee, where the external review panel orally presents a first draft of its report.

It is recommended that on-line interviews be made in advance in order to facilitate maximum participation.

Structure of the external report

The external review report is based on the external review panel's report and consists of the following subsections:

–   Introduction: goals, composition of the external review panel, work schedule, incidents.

–   Assessment of the self-evaluation process.

–   The external review panel's assessment of each section in the protocol, including a justification of the value judgment (evidence on which it bases its assessment, etc.).

–   General assessment: strong and weak points, conclusions and recommendations.

–   Assessment of the external review process.

The external report, which is drawn up by the external review panel, is based on the institutional external report and the self-evaluation report on degrees. For example, the outcomes section will include the external institutional review panel's analysis of the planning and functioning of quality assurance mechanisms with regard to outcomes, which is followed by an assessment of whether the outcomes are in practice satisfactory for each degree programme assessed.

Reaction of the unit (degree)

An important characteristic of the institutional evaluation process is its transparency, and the possibility is thus open to the university to qualify the external report. This means that instead of there being a need for absolute agreement between the two committees, a formal mechanism is established whereby different lines of reasoning for the assessment can be put on record.

Once this stage has been completed, the external review panel's report is considered to be definitive and the external review stage comes to an end.

The final reports

The **university** that has been evaluated may, where appropriate, produce a report for its community, with the following characteristics:

▪ It is the self-evaluation committee that drafts this report using the self-evaluation report and the external report. This report contains a summary of the assessment of the different dimensions, the strong and weak points and essentially **the improvement plan for the degree programme, studies or institution in general**.

▪ This report shall be widely publicised among the members of the community and addressed to the university's quality committee. The report thereby fulfils the functions of:

   – Accountability of the development and results of the evaluation before a higher body.

   – Guaranteeing the degree community's commitment to carry out the improvement actions proposed in the report.

   – Ensuring the institution's commitment and support to the proposals for improvement.

AQU Catalunya will also prepare a report for outside information purposes (to society), the basis for which is the external review report. This report is submitted to the studies or institution for consideration and approved by the Agency's Quality Assessment Committee. Its content shall form part of the annual assessment report made public by AQU Catalunya.

Evaluation protocol

Scale of assessment:

a) Highly appropriate   / Highly adequate   / Highly satisfactory

b) Appropriate   / Adequate   / Satisfactory

c) Not very appropriate   / Not very adequate   / Not very satisfactory

d) Inappropriate   / Inadequate   / Unsatisfactory

0. The self-evaluation process

Key question:
Is the self-evaluation of the degree programme a satisfactory process?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:
* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
0.1. Attitude of the degree programme community with regard to the evaluation process				
0.2. Support and collaboration from the evaluation technical unit				
0.3. Support and collaboration from the university's governing bodies				
0.4. Internal process of drawing up the report				
0.5. Actions to disseminate and promote participation in the evaluation process				
0.6. The community's level of response in the process				
0.7. Overall assessment of the internal report				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes in relation to the previous evaluation process
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

NB: Details must be given of the composition of the self-evaluation committee and also the number of meetings and the work schedule.

1. Strategic position of the degree programme

1.1. Internal strategic position

Key question:

Does the degree programme's have a favourable internal strategic position?

Highly favourable	A	Favourable	B	Not very favourable	C	Unfavourable	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
1.1.1. Degree of definition and documentation of the proposed programme and its adequacy to the institutional mission and vision				
1.1.2. Appropriateness of the student profile to the degree programme's mission and vision				
1.1.3. Position of the degree programme in terms of the total number of students in relation to the university's other degree programmes				
1.1.4. The degree programme's position with regard to the adequacy of the teaching staff profile to the specific needs of e-learning programmes				
1.1.5. Position of the degree programme with regard to the number of regular teaching staff on the programme				
1.1.6. Position of the degree programme with regard to the professional relationship of collaborating teaching staff (suitability of the professional profile to the degree programme)				
1.1.7. Views on the degree of institutional support provided				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place during the last five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

1. Strategic position of the degree programme

1.1. Internal strategic position

Standards

The degree programme has a strong position in the institution, which may be due to the clear match of the proposal with the institutional mission and vision, the number and characteristics of enrolled students, the number and characteristics of the programme's teaching staff, and/or the degree of institutional support received.

Evidence

- Studies on the profiles of new entry students and also enrolled students.

- With regard to the quantity and quality of the students, tables 1a, 1b, 2 and 3 provide the self-evaluation committee with evidence – programmes offered, demand, new entry students, total number of enrolled students – that place the degree programme in a stronger or weaker position, on the basis of its course of development and situation relative to the rest of the university's degree programmes and, in particular, other degree programmes that are similar.

- Explicit documentation that justifies the programme is in accordance with the institutional mission.

- Teaching staff (see table 10).

1.2. External strategic position

Key question:

Does the degree programme have a favourable external strategic position?

Highly favourable	A	Favourable	B	Not very favourable	C	Unfavourable	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
1.2.1. Comparison of the proposed programme with other proposed programmes at well-known and prestigious universities				
1.2.2. Importance of the number of students on the degree programme in relation to other universities that give the same programme				
1.2.3. Comparison of the quality of the students on the degree programme with that of students on the same degree programme in other universities				
1.2.4. Comparison of the type of teaching staff (in the department and professionally linked) with that established in other well-known and prestigious universities giving the same distance learning programme				
1.2.5. Comparison of the programme's teacher-student ratio with that of other well-known and prestigious universities giving the same distance learning programme				
1.2.6. Degree to which the teaching staff on the degree programme participate in well-known professional and scientific networks				
1.2.7. Perceived views on the standing of graduates in the socio-economic context (critical mass)				
1.2.8. Perceived views on the degree programme in relation to the degree of social and political support				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place over the last five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

1.2. External strategic position

Standards

The degree has a strong external strategic position due to the fact that the proposed programme, the quantity and profile of the students, and the type, volume and profile of the teaching staff are comparable with other well-known and prestigious distance learning proposals.

The teaching staff on the degree programme participate in well-known national and international professional and scientific networks.

Evidence

Documentation:

- Comparative studies with other study programme proposals, mainly with similar distance learning programmes.

- Quantitative analysis of the number of students enrolled in the degree programme in different universities giving the same programme, mainly by distance learning.

- Comparative studies on the type of students on the degree programme in different universities giving the same programme, mainly by distance learning.

- Comparative analysis between universities of the number of teaching staff assigned to this distance learning degree.

Statistics:

- Number of PhDs, graduates and diploma holders among the teaching staff on the degree programme.

- Presence of teaching staff in recognised professional and scientific networks.

- Number of works by the teaching staff published in recognised, well-known journals.

- Number of works by the teaching staff on methodologies applied to distance learning published in well-known journals.

Comparative analysis with the results of other universities.

2. Study programme

2.1. Definition of the learning outcomes

Key question:

Is the definition of the learning outcomes satisfactory?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
2.1.1. Degree to which the structure of the learning outcomes is developed (specific academic and professional competences and transversal competences)				
2.1.2. Use of national and international academic and professional benchmarks				
2.1.3. Degree to which the learning outcomes is adapted to academic and professional requirements				
2.1.4. Participation by the different internal and external stakeholders in defining the learning outcomes				
2.1.5. Degree of awareness and consensus among the university community in relation to the learning outcomes				
2.1.6. Relevance of the institutional goals of the degree programme in relation to the stated learning outcomes				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

2. Study programme

2.1. Definition of the study programme

Standards

- The learning outcomes clearly define the competences.

- The learning outcomes include the academic, scientific, professional and transversal competences to be developed by the students.

- The adequacy of the content and goals of the learning outcomes in relation to professional requirements is explicitly analysed and established.

- The mechanisms for internal and external stakeholders to participate are laid down in the definition of the learning outcomes.

- The mechanisms for disseminating the learning outcomes to the university community are laid down in the definition of the same.

Evidence

- Existing documented studies on the definition of the learning outcomes.

- Existing documented analysis of the most appropriate competences for the learning outcomes.

- Specific derivation analysis of the most important learning goals relative to the competences and learning outcomes.

- Existence of established procedures for the different internal and external stakeholders to participate in defining the profile.

- Existence of established procedures to review and update the learning outcomes and the impact of these on the study programme.

2.2. Adequacy of the study programme

Key question:

Is the study programme appropriate to the learning outcomes?

Highly appropriate	A	Appropriate	B	Not very appropriate	C	Inappropriate	D

Indicators:

See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
2.2.1. Appropriate coherency between the study programme and learning outcomes				
2.2.2. Internal consistency of the study programme's structure and its coherency with the learning outcomes				
2.2.3. Evidence in the study programme of activities aimed at developing the competences envisaged in the learning outcomes				
2.2.4. Coherency of the contents, activities and methodologies of syllabi with the study programme				
2.2.5. Adequacy of the time given in the study programme to develop activities				
2.2.6. Coherency between syllabi in the same study programme				
2.2.7. Existence of documented and publicly available study programmes and syllabi				
2.2.8. The teaching staff's degree of satisfaction with the study programme				
2.2.9. The students' degree of satisfaction with the study programme				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

2.2. Adequacy of the study programme

Standards

- The study programme is specified and documented.

- The study programme is structured on the basis of goals that derive from the learning outcomes.

- The study programme is aimed at developing the competences associated with the learning outcomes.

- Syllabi are coherent with each other and with the study programme.

- The institution has documented and made public the study programmes and syllabi.

Evidence

- Existence of explicit documentation on the study programme.

- Documentary evidence of the different syllabi.

- Detailed specification of the guiding aims and competences to be developed in the study programme.

- The way that competences are to be developed is specified in the syllabi.

- Documentary evidence of procedures for analysing the teaching staff's satisfaction with the study programme.

- Documentary evidence of procedures for analysing the students' satisfaction with the study programme.

- Documentary evidence of procedures for analysing the graduates' satisfaction with the study programme.

- Documentary evidence of formal procedures for analysing the coherency between syllabi and the study programme.

- Documentary evidence of formal procedures for analysing the coherency between the different courses within the framework of the programme.

3. Instruction design

3.1. Teaching methodology

Key question:

Is the teaching methodology appropriate to the type of degree programme and the characteristics of distance learning programmes?

Highly appropriate	A	Appropriate	B	Not very appropriate	C	Inappropriate	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.1.1. Adequacy of the methodology with regard to the teaching goals, especially competences				
3.1.2. Degree to which team work activities are specified, in relation to the development of programming according to competences				
3.1.3. Adequacy of the methodology in relation to the characteristics of distance learning programmes				
3.1.4. Existence of a methodology that applies the most appropriate teaching resources according to the type of degree				
3.1.5. Adequacy of learning resources in relation to the characteristics of distance learning programmes				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3. Instruction design

3.1. Teaching methodology

Standards

- The teaching methodology is adequate for the teaching goals, especially bearing in mind new competence-development approaches.

- The teaching methodology is suitable for the characteristics of distance learning programmes.

- Learning resources are appropriate to the methodology proposed for achieving the learning goals.

- Learning resources are appropriate to the methodology proposed in the distance learning degree programmes.

Evidence

- Existence of procedures and methodology guides for teaching that is suitable for e-learning education.

- Studies carried out on the quality and proper functioning of the guides.

- Indices of the teaching staff's opinions on the teaching methodology used.

- Indices of student satisfaction with the teaching methodology used.

- Specific procedures for the review of teaching methodology.

- Specific plans for methodology innovation.

Key question:

Are proposed activities adequate in relation to the learning outcomes and the characteristics of distance learning programmes?

Highly adequate	A	Adequate	B	Not very adequate	C	Inadequate	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.2.1. Overall adequacy of the group of activities listed in the syllabus in relation to the development of professional competences in the students.				
3.2.2. Adequacy of the learning activities in relation to the particular characteristics of distance learning programmes				
3.2.3. Adequacy of the time allocated to developing learning activities				
3.2.4. Adequacy of programmed evaluation activities in relation to the model for developing competences				
3.2.5. Adequacy of the evaluation activities in relation to the characteristics of distance learning programmes				
3.2.6. Quality of the learning resources allocated for the learning activities				
3.2.7. Appropriateness of the final year project/work experience placement to the learning goals				
3.2.8. Degree to which the final year project /work experience placement is orientated towards the professional world				
3.2.9. Assessment of the process delivery (organisation, orientation and supervision) in the framework of the final year project/work experience placement				
3.2.10. Appropriateness of student evaluation when doing the final year project/work experience placement				
3.2.11. Degree of student satisfaction with the final year project/work experience placement				
3.2.12. Degree of teaching staff satisfaction with the final year project/work experience placement				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3.2. Adequacy of the activities

Standards
- The general activities included in the degree curriculum are designed with the development of professional competences in mind.
- Activities planned in the course syllabi facilitate the development of the academic, scientific and professional competences associated with the courses.
- The teaching and learning activities are appropriate to the characteristics of distance learning programmes.
- The scheduled time is sufficient for the delivery of the teaching activities.
- The technological environments are appropriate for the delivery of the teaching activities.
- The evaluation activities are consistent with the model for competence development.
- The evaluation activities are designed according to the characteristics of distance learning programmes.
- There are team work systems for the programming of competence development activities.
- The learning resources designed to support the learning activities are sufficient and adequate for distance learning degree programmes.
- The final year project/work experience placement is evaluated on a collegial basis with the participation of teaching staff and professional experts.
- Reviewers and students have clear criteria to assess the final year project/work experience placement, including an assessment of the acquisition of certain specific and transversal competences in the degree.
- The number of places and projects offered is coherent and consistent with the goals of the degree.
- The students are given appropriate guidance for choosing the final year project/work experience placement.
- Each student gives periodic information on the development of the final year project/work experience placement and receives advice on the project from the teaching staff.

Evidence
- Existence of documentation on the curriculum.
- Existence of documentation on the course syllabi.
- Sampling of learning activity models.
- Sampling of evaluation activity models.
- Existence of studies on the adequacy of the technological environments in relation to the nature and type of activities.
- Existence of analyses on the planning over time of the development of learning activities.
- Justification of the nature of classroom-based activities.
- Documentation of the system for organising the students' work.
- Established procedures for setting up, reviewing and updating courses.
- Guides for preparing learning resources in digital format.
- Existing procedures for the review and updating of learning resources.
- Handbook for the design, development, supervising and evaluation of the final year project/work experience placement.
- Existence of documentation on policy covering the final year project/work experience placement.
- Procedures for analysing student satisfaction and the teaching staff's opinions regarding the final year project/work experience placement.
- Procedures for analysing the professional orientation of the final year project/work experience placement.

3.3.	Organisation of the degree

Key question:

Is the degree programme organised in an appropriate way in relation to the particular characteristics of non-classroom-based systems?

Highly appropriate	A	Appropriate	B	Not very appropriate	C	Inappropriate	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.3.1. Conformity of the degree programme's organisation with the characteristics of the students and student learning				
3.3.2. Justification for the inclusion of classroom-based learning activities, according to their importance and the inherent difficulties in their on-line delivery				
3.3.3. Communication system to let new students know how the system works				
3.3.4. Mechanisms of continuous support for the students				
3.3.5. Mechanisms for finding out the students' needs				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3.3. Organisation of the degree

Standards

- The organisation of the degree programme is appropriate in relation to the characteristics of the students.

- The organisation of the degree programme incorporates justified classroom-based learning elements that are essential when on-line delivery is particularly difficult.

- There is specific and adequate initial communication with new students for them to know how the non-classroom based system works.

- There are adequate continuous support mechanisms for the students.

- There are adequate mechanisms for finding out the students' needs.

Evidence

- Existence of documentation on the degree's organisational structure.

- Existence of documentation on a reception and follow-up plan for new entry students.

- Existing procedures to monitor how teaching management and support mechanisms work.

- Indices of student and teaching staff satisfaction in relation to teaching management and the support mechanisms.

3.4. Student orientation, tutoring and advisory system

Key question:

Does the orientation and tutorial system used in the degree programme work in a satisfactory way?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.4.1. Level of student satisfaction with the orientation system				
3.4.2. Level of student satisfaction with tutoring				
3.4.3. Level of student satisfaction with advisory action				
3.4.4. Proportion of students per subject adviser				
3.4.5. Proportion of students per tutorial teacher				
3.4.6. Flexibility, speed and functionality of tutors' response to the students' queries				
3.4.7. Flexibility, speed and functionality of the advisers' response to the students' queries				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3.4. Student orientation and tutorial system

Standards

- The institution has a student support system, especially for personal, academic and professional tutoring. The institution has established measures to facilitate the good academic integration of students

- Each student is allocated a tutorial teacher to refer to.

- There is a system of advisors available to the students for the different course subjects.

- The system for making queries is direct and responses are given rapidly.

- The responses are of good quality.

Evidence

- Student-tutor ratio.

- Student-advisor ratio.

- Frequency with which orientation and tutoring services are used.

- Mean deviation of the response time in relation to the maximum time established by the institution.

- Level of student satisfaction with the orientation and tutoring services and with the speed that responses are received.

- There are established procedures to review the running and enhancement of the student orientation and tutoring services.

3.5. Technical set-up for instruction

Key question:

Is the technical set-up for instruction satisfactory?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.5.1. Speed of access and stability of the online environment for ensuring its permanent functioning				
3.5.2. Adequacy of the online environment to the goals of the degree programme				
3.5.3. Adequacy of the online environment to the learning activities				
3.5.4. Ease of use of the online campus				
3.5.5. Easy search for information in the online campus				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3.5. Technical set-up for instruction

Standards

- The online environment is highly sound and appropriate to the goals of the degree programme and it ensures the permanent functioning of the system.

- The operating system responds efficiently to the needs of teaching staff and students.

Evidence

- Existence of instruments to help students to start using online environments.

- Existence of permanent technical support services for teaching staff and students.

- Connection data on students and teaching staff.

- Ratio between the number of incidents per year and the number of users.

- Number of hits/visits on the online campus.

- Level of teaching staff and student satisfaction, analysed by specific established procedures.

3.6. Interpersonal communication systems

Key question:

Is there satisfactory interpersonal communication between persons/subjects in the different groups?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:
* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
3.6.1. Degree of interpersonal communication between subjects in the different university groups				
3.6.2. Encouragement by the teaching staff to activate intercommunication between students in the same group				
3.6.3. Degree to which multidirectional communication is promoted for non-academic group activities put into effect by the institution				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

3.6. Interpersonal communication systems

Standards

- Existence of systems and ways for interpersonal communication between the different groups (students, students-teachers, teachers).

- Planning of activities to encourage communication between students in the same group.

- Planning of non-academic group activities to promote multidirectional communication.

Evidence

- Message traffic between subjects in different groups.

- Existence of areas for online group work.

- Existence of common areas for exchange between the different groups.

- Existence of committees to encourage student and teaching staff participation.

- Number of existing online work groups.

- Statistics on the frequency of communications.

- Established procedures for analysing how the interpersonal communication systems work.

- Established procedures for analysing teaching staff and student satisfaction with the interpersonal communication systems.

4. Learning assessment

4.1. Assessment system

Key question:

Is the learning assessment system adequate for the type of degree and the specific characteristics of online degrees?

Highly adequate	A	Adequate	B	Not very adequate	C	Inadequate	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
4.1.1. Level of learning achievement to obtain the qualification or degree				
4.1.2. Adequacy of the assessment methods and instruments applied for checking the students' performance				
4.1.3. Specification and general knowledge of the assessment criteria				
4.1.4. Support procedures for the students to prepare for assessments				
4.1.5. Updating of assessment tests and strategies				
4.1.6. Systems to review assessment methodologies				
4.1.7. Specification and knowledge of systems to appeal the assessment results				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

4. Learning assessment

4.1. Assessment system

Standards

- The obtaining of a degree or other qualification requires the student to have completed a series of specified assessments that cover the learning skills identified as being important.

- The assessment methods and instruments applied to verify the performance of the students are valid and clearly refer to the type and kind of learning activity to be covered and are appropriate to the distance learning education system.

- The assessment criteria are clearly established, they are given in the institution's publications and, in general, are well known and understood by the students and teaching staff.

- The institution ensures that students have real possibilities of passing or becoming prepared in order to pass the assessments through processes of continuous assessment of their progress, assisted by the actions of tutorial teachers and advisors.

- The assessments are periodically reviewed and updated to take account of changes taking place in the specific field of knowledge.

- Assessment methodologies are periodically reviewed to check their suitability to the type and nature of learning and any changes occurring, and also to technological innovations incorporated in the system.

- Systems to appeal assessment results are well established and are known by the teaching staff and students.

Evidence

- Existence of public documentation that defines the assessment model to be used.

- Public document that specifies the assessment criteria.

- Specific mention in the syllabus of the fundamental goals of the courses and the nature of and criteria for the assessment.

- Public procedures for students to appeal the results of the assessment.

- Procedures to review and improve the adequacy of assessment methodologies.

- Procedures for analysing student satisfaction and the opinions of teaching staff concerning the assessment system.

5. Outcomes

5.1. Academic outcomes

Key question:

Are the students' academic outcomes satisfactory?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
5.1.1. Time taken to complete studies				
5.1.2. Drop-out rate				
5.1.3. Level of academic success				
5.1.4. Level of performance achieved				
5.1.5. Level of efficiency				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

5. Outcomes

5.1. Academic outcomes

Standards

- The students complete their studies in the time envisaged according to their personal situation.

- The dropout, success, performance and efficiency rates are adequate and in line with the nature of these degree programmes.

Evidence

- Mean deviation of the time taken by the student body to complete studies in relation to the average time as expressed in their personal tutored projects.

- Data and statistics on the dropout, performance and efficiency rates.

- Documented plans on the degree to enhance the academic outcomes and that provide an appropriate interpretation of the different rates.

5.2.   Professional outcomes

Key question:

Are the professional outcomes of the students satisfactory?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
5.2.1. Level of professional development and advancement of the graduates				
5.2.2. The degree to which external stakeholders participate in assessing graduates				
5.2.3. Short-term level of employment/professional advancement				
5.2.4. Medium-term level of employment/professional advancement				
5.2.5. Level of graduate satisfaction with the programme				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

5.2. Professional outcomes

Standards

- The distance learning degree programme facilitates the professional advancement and development of the students.

- The professional advancement of the graduates is relevant and continuous.

- The external stakeholders are involved in analysing the quality of competences acquired by graduates and their professional advancement and improvement.

- The graduates express their irrefutable satisfaction with learning received during their studies.

- Short and medium-term employment is satisfactory.

Evidence

- Documentary evidence of information on the graduates' satisfaction with learning received during their studies.

- Documentary evidence of information on the degree of quality of short and medium-term employment and professional advancement.

- Documentary evidence on the level of employers' satisfaction with the professional quality of graduates.

5.3.	Personal outcomes

Key question:

Are the students' personal outcomes satisfactory?

Highly satisfactory	A	Satisfactory	B	Not very satisfactory	C	Unsatisfactory	D

Indicators:

* See the scale of assessment on the first page of the protocol.

	a	b	c	d
5.3.1. Level of the graduates' personal development				
5.3.2. Degree to which the graduates develop key and transversal competences				
5.3.3. Level of assessment of the graduates' personal development as expressed by employers				
5.3.4. The graduates' level of satisfaction with their own personal development				

1. Assessment of the quality of the evidence provided
2. Significant changes that have taken place in the previous five years
3. Comments/clarifications regarding the assessment of indicators
4. Most significant strong points
5. Most significant weak points and possible explanations for why they exist
6. Direction of proposals for improvement/change

5.3. Personal outcomes

Standards

- The graduates' studies contributed to their personal development.

- The graduates' studies helped to develop their key and transversal competences.

- The external stakeholders positively assess the graduates' personal level of development.

- The graduates' own views on their level of personal development are satisfactory.

Evidence

- Documentary existence of the analysis of the graduates' personal development.

- Presence in the syllabus of activities aimed at the students' personal development.

- Analysis of the students' results in these activities and their development.

- Studies on the employers' satisfaction with the level of the graduates' personal development.

- Studies on the graduates' level of satisfaction with their own personal development