

AUDIT PROGRAMME

Guidelines, definition and documentation for internal quality assurance systems in higher education

Document 02

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FOREWORD

This document, which complements the “Guide to the design of internal quality assurance systems in higher education”, was drawn up by ANECA, AQU and ACSUG in order to support initiatives by the universities for the quality assurance of their provision and to promote a culture of continuous improvement. It has a twofold goal: to orientate the structuring of actions carried out by higher education institutions (HEIs) to set up internal quality assurance systems, and to provide HEIs with examples of guidelines to guide them through the process of developing these systems.

The anticipated result of the first goal of AUDIT is the HEIs' **analysis or diagnosis** of their internal quality assurance systems according to a series of guidelines. This comparison may help to establish how much ground has been covered already and the direction in which forthcoming actions should be directed. The AUDIT Programme includes a complementary instrument, “Tools for the diagnosis” (Document 03), for carrying out the analysis. The anticipated result of the AUDIT programme's second goal is the **defining and documenting** of the group of internal quality assurance systems that the institution decides to adopt in the light of the analysis of the benchmarks given in this document, together with information obtained from the preliminary diagnosis of the situation.

1. Guidelines for designing internal quality assurance systems.

A series of guidelines for designing internal quality assurance systems are provided in this section to help HEIs in the process of diagnosing these systems. Document 03, "Tools for the diagnosis", is also to be used by HEIs for this purpose along with these guidelines.

The wording of the instructions puts special emphasis on the *how*, more than the *what* of internal quality assurance systems. As to merely forming a series of systems on the basis of a thorough list of the elements that they should contain, effort and thought put into the design need to take into consideration the importance of the processes and adopt a proactive position ("*how* the HEI acts on the pathway to improvement", and/or "*how* to tackle the necessary changes in their regular way of doing things"), which can ultimately be summarised as "*how* the HEI achieves the quality assurance of its programmes".

It is of great help to consider the various elements given within the scope of the model in figure 2 as an aggregate system made up of parts, each with their own identity yet interrelating with each other. In order for them to be managed appropriately, each process can be implemented in order to make visible the sequence and interaction of activities that take place. The degree of detail achieved in dealing with each process and subprocess is the decision of each HEI, although it may be advisable to consider a minimum point of development in order for the main processes to be managed effectively, and to gradually deal with the implementation and consolidation of the remaining processes in internal quality assurance systems.

One good practice is to document all of the aspects relative to the internal quality assurance systems in the form of procedures, regulations, manuals, process files, diagrams, etc. This practice will make subsequent activities involving maintenance, improvement and its own evaluation much easier.

Examples of the guideline are given below to help HEIs in designing internal quality assurance systems. The instructions envisage interactions taking place between the different aspects that make up the system and its scope.

General guidelines

1.0. How the HEI defines its quality policy and goals.

The HEI must consolidate a quality culture supported by a policy and goals for quality that are known and publicly accessible.

The HEI must:

- 1.0.1. Make a public statement in writing that sets out its quality policy, together with its scope and goals.
- 1.0.2. State the interest groups involved in defining the quality policy.
- 1.0.3. Integrate different elements (bodies, procedures, processes, etc.) to establish a system whereby this quality policy can be implemented.
- 1.0.4. Establish actions to define, approve, review and improve the quality policy and goals.
- 1.0.5. Determine the accountability procedure (how, who, when) with the interest groups in relation to compliance with the quality policy and fulfilment of the quality goals.

Specific guidelines

1.1. How the HEI ensures the quality of its programmes.

The institution must have mechanisms to maintain and update its programmes and develop methodologies to approve, control, evaluate and periodically improve their quality.

On its various different organisational levels, the HEI must:

- 1.1.1. Determine the bodies, interest groups, and procedures involved in the design, control, planning, development and periodic review of qualifications, their goals and associated areas of competence.
- 1.1.2. Have systems to gather and analyse information (from both national and international sources) in order to be able to assess the maintenance, updating and renewal of its programmes.
- 1.1.3. Have mechanisms to regulate the decision-making process relative to its provision and the design of programmes and their goals.
- 1.1.4. Ensure that the necessary mechanisms are developed to implement improvements stemming from the periodic review of degree programmes.
- 1.1.5. Determine the way (how, who, when) to be accountable to the interest groups in relation to compliance with the quality policy and fulfilment of the quality goals.
- 1.1.6. Define the criteria for the eventual suspension of the programme.

1.2. How the HEI orientates its programmes towards the students.

The HEI must be provided with procedures to check that the fundamental purpose of its actions is to encourage student learning.

The HEI must:

- 1.2.1. Have information systems that enable it to know and assess the HEI's requirements concerning:
 1. Definition of entry/graduation profiles
 2. Admission and registration
 3. Pleas, appeals and suggestions
 4. Student support and guidance for classroom activities
 5. Teaching and evaluation of learning
 6. Work experience and student mobility
 7. Careers guidance
- 1.2.2 Be provided with mechanisms to obtain, assess and check information on the current development of the abovementioned processes.
- 1.2.3. Establish mechanisms to regulate the guidelines that affect students: regulations (examinations, disciplinary measures, requests for certificates, qualification endorsement, etc.), rules of use (facilities), schedules, timetables and benefits offered by the university.
- 1.2.4. Define how processes and actions associated with students are controlled, periodically reviewed and improved.
- 1.2.5. Determine the procedures it uses to regulate and assure decision-making processes associated with students.
- 1.2.6. Identify how interest groups participate in the design and development of processes associated with student learning.
- 1.2.7. State the procedure (how, who, when) used for the accountability of student learning outcomes.

1.3. How the HEI assures and enhances the quality of its academic staff.

The HEI/university must have mechanisms to ensure that the recruitment, management and training of its academic staff and service and administration staff are carried out with appropriate safeguards in order for them to carry out their corresponding functions.

The HEI must:

- 1.3.1. Be provided with procedures to gather and assess information on its academic staff requirements (job specifications, required competences, etc.), in accordance with its staff policy.
- 1.3.2. Have the means to gather and analyse information relative to the abilities and current results of academic staff, with a view to recruitment, training, performance evaluation, promotion and recognition.
- 1.3.3. Define the approach to control, periodically review and continuously enhance its policy and actions associated with academic staff.
- 1.3.4. Determine its procedures to regulate and assure decision-making processes associated with recruitment, evaluation, promotion, training and recognition.
- 1.3.5. Identify the way in which interest groups (especially teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff) participate in defining and developing the staff policy.
- 1.3.6. State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) concerning the results of its staff policy.

1.4. How the HEI manages and improves its physical resources and services

The HEI/university must be provided with mechanisms so it can design, manage and improve its services and physical resources¹ in order for student learning to develop appropriately.

The HEI must:

- 1.4.1. Have mechanisms to obtain and assess information on the requisites for the design, allocation, maintenance and management of physical resources and services (including aspects associated with security and the environment).
- 1.4.2. Have procedures that provide information on its systems to maintain, manage and adapt physical resources and services.
- 1.4.3. Define the system to control, periodically review and continuously improve its policy and actions concerning administration and services staff.
- 1.4.5. Define how the control, periodic review and improvement of physical resources and services is carried out.
- 1.4.6. Determine its procedures to regulate and assure the decision-making processes associated with physical resources and services.
- 1.4.7. Establish the procedures to channel the different ways that interest groups participate in the management of physical resources and the provision of services.
- 1.4.8. State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) for adapting physical resources and services to the learning of students and their level of use.

¹ Facilities (classrooms, study rooms, computer rooms, laboratories, meeting rooms, library seating), equipment, and scientific, technical, medical care, and artistic material.

1.5. How the HEI analyses and takes into consideration the outcomes.

The HEI/university must be provided with procedures to ensure that outcomes (learning, graduate employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) are measured, analysed and used² for decision-making and to enhance the quality of degree programmes.

The HEI must:

- 1.5.1. Have mechanisms to obtain information on the needs and expectations of the different interest groups in relation to the quality of the programmes.
- 1.5.2. Have systems to gather information to provide data on learning outcomes, graduate employment and the satisfaction of interest groups.
- 1.5.3. Define how the control, periodic review and continuous enhancement of outcomes and data reliability is carried out.
- 1.5.4. Determine the strategies and approach for enhancing the outcomes.
- 1.5.5. Determine the various procedures to regulate and assure results-based decision-making processes.
- 1.5.6. Identify how interest groups are involved in the measurement, analysis and enhancement of outcomes.
- 1.5.7. State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) for outcomes (activities reports, outcome reports, etc.).

² Outcomes should be divided up according to the different types of student, e.g. full-time, part-time, distance-learning, over 25s, second degrees, did not sit exams, etc.

1.6. How the HEI publishes information on degree programmes.

The HEI must be equipped with mechanisms to ensure that updated information on degrees and programmes is published periodically.

The HEI must:

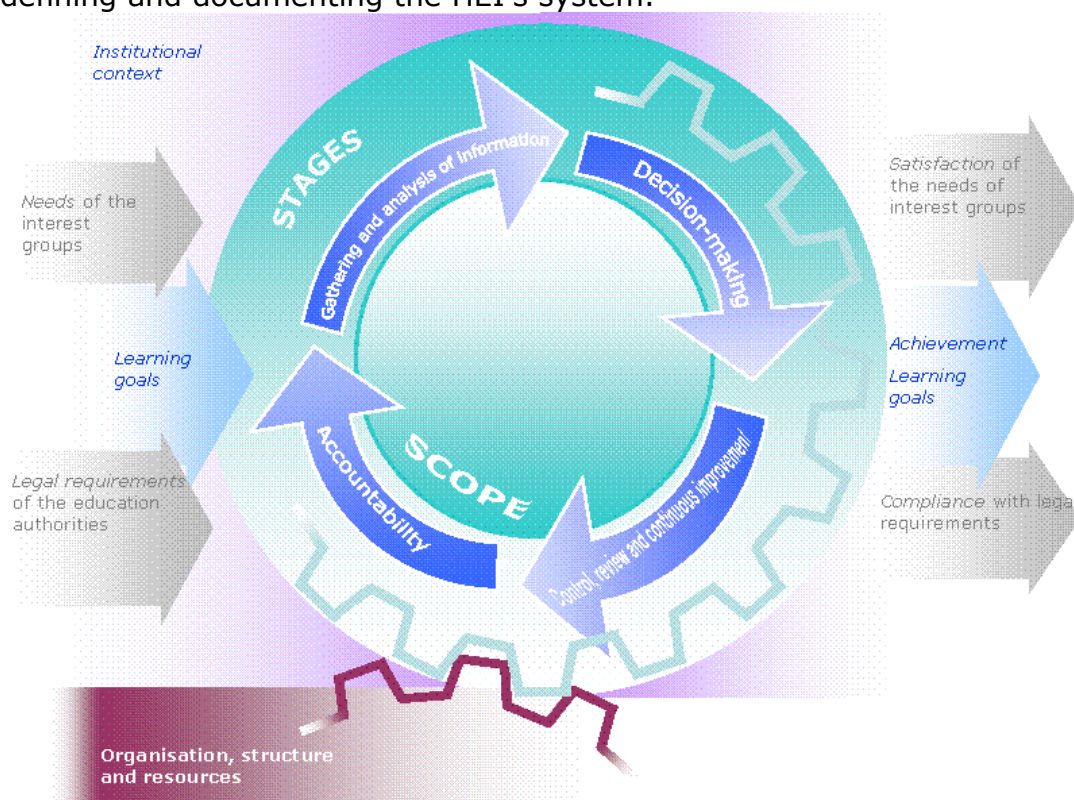
- 1.6.1. Have mechanisms to obtain information on the development of qualifications and programmes.
- 1.6.2. Determine the established procedure for informing interest groups (including the different levels of the HEI's organisational structure) about:
 - The programmes it offers
 - Goals and planning of qualifications.
 - Student admission and guidance policies.
 - Teaching, learning and evaluation methodologies (including work experience).
 - Mobility.
 - Pleas, appeals and suggestions.
 - Recruitment, evaluation, promotion and recognition of academic staff and administration and services staff.
 - Services and the use of physical resources.
 - Teaching outcomes (learning, graduate employment and satisfaction of the different interest groups).
- 1.6.3. Define how the control, periodic review and continuous improvement of public information provided to interest groups is carried out.
- 1.6.4. Determine the procedures for regulating and assuring decision-making processes associated with the publishing of information on the programmes and qualifications offered by the HEI.

2. DEFINING AND DOCUMENTING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

The diagnosis carried out according to the instructions in the previous stages (together with documents 01 and 03, "Guide to designing internal quality assurance systems" and "Tools for the diagnosis") provide the necessary information to start the stage for defining and documenting the system. This involves the definition and documentation, using a handbook or similar procedure, the different mechanisms and processes necessary to assure the quality of programmes of study and involves consideration being given for each one to aspects such as:

- a) Aims and principles for action.
- b) Interest groups.
- c) Scope
- d) Stages
- e) Procedures
- f) Organisation, structure and resources.

Figure 1 shows the series of aspects to be taken into consideration when defining and documenting the HEI's system.



2.1.- Structure in the defining and documenting of internal quality assurance systems

a) Aims and principles of action.

The designing of internal quality assurance systems forms an essential element in the HEI's teaching policy and activities, and the goals that it seeks to achieve through their implementation must therefore be set in advance.

When preparing these systems, the HEI must at least comply with the following principles of action:

- Legality and legal certainty: The HEI shall design its internal quality assurance system in accordance with prevailing university legislation and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance laid down in the European Higher Education Area.
- Public availability, transparency and participation: The HEI shall disseminate the process whereby its internal quality assurance system has been produced, establish procedures to facilitate the incorporation of proposals and reports produced during this process, and make it possible for all interest groups involved to participate.

b) Interest groups.

The HEI must state the interest groups targeted by the system. This therefore includes the groups that are directly and indirectly involved in higher education quality assurance processes:

- Students.
- Manager, teaching and research staff, and administration and services staff at the institution.
- Education authorities.
- Employers.
- Society.

c) Stages.

The design of the internal quality assurance system will of necessity involve the defining of a series of stages that involve:

- Gathering and analysis of information.
- The control, periodic review and continuous improvement of actions.

- The mechanisms and strategies for decision-making, especially those affecting programmes of study.
- Accountability to the interest groups regarding actions carried out, especially those concerning programmes of study.

d) Scope.

When defining internal quality assurance systems, the HEI must at least consider the elements that affect programmes of study:

Design of the programmes offered:

- Definition of quality policy and goals
- Definition and approval of programmes of study
- Student admission criteria
- Planning of the programmes offered
- Criteria for the eventual suspension of a programme of study

Classroom activities and student-orientated actions:

- Student reception and learning support activities
- Development of programmes offered
 - Teaching-learning methodology
 - Learning assessment
- Work experience and student mobility
- Careers guidance
- Evaluation and enhancement of the programmes offered
 - Implementation of detected improvement actions
- Handling of complaints and appeals
- Administration of student records and certificates

Academic staff and auxiliary teaching staff:

- Recruitment, evaluation, promotion, training, recognition and support for teaching

Physical resources and services:

- Design, management and improvement of classrooms, workspaces, laboratories and experimental spaces, libraries and library collections.
- Resources and services for learning and student support

Learning outcomes:

- Measurement, analysis and use of outcomes:
 - graduate employment
 - academic
 - satisfaction of the different interest groups

Public information:

- Dissemination of updated information on programmes.

e) Procedures

According to the degree of complexity and the need for control over the processes to be included in the internal quality assurance system, an analysis must be made concerning the advisability of whether these are to be documented in the form of procedures, flow diagrams, process files, etc., where an adequate description is given of their goal, scope, responsibilities, reference documentation, description of the process, type of control, etc.

f) Organisation, structure and resources.

The HEI must specify the organisational and structural aspects, in addition to the resources, that will support and structure the internal quality assurance system.

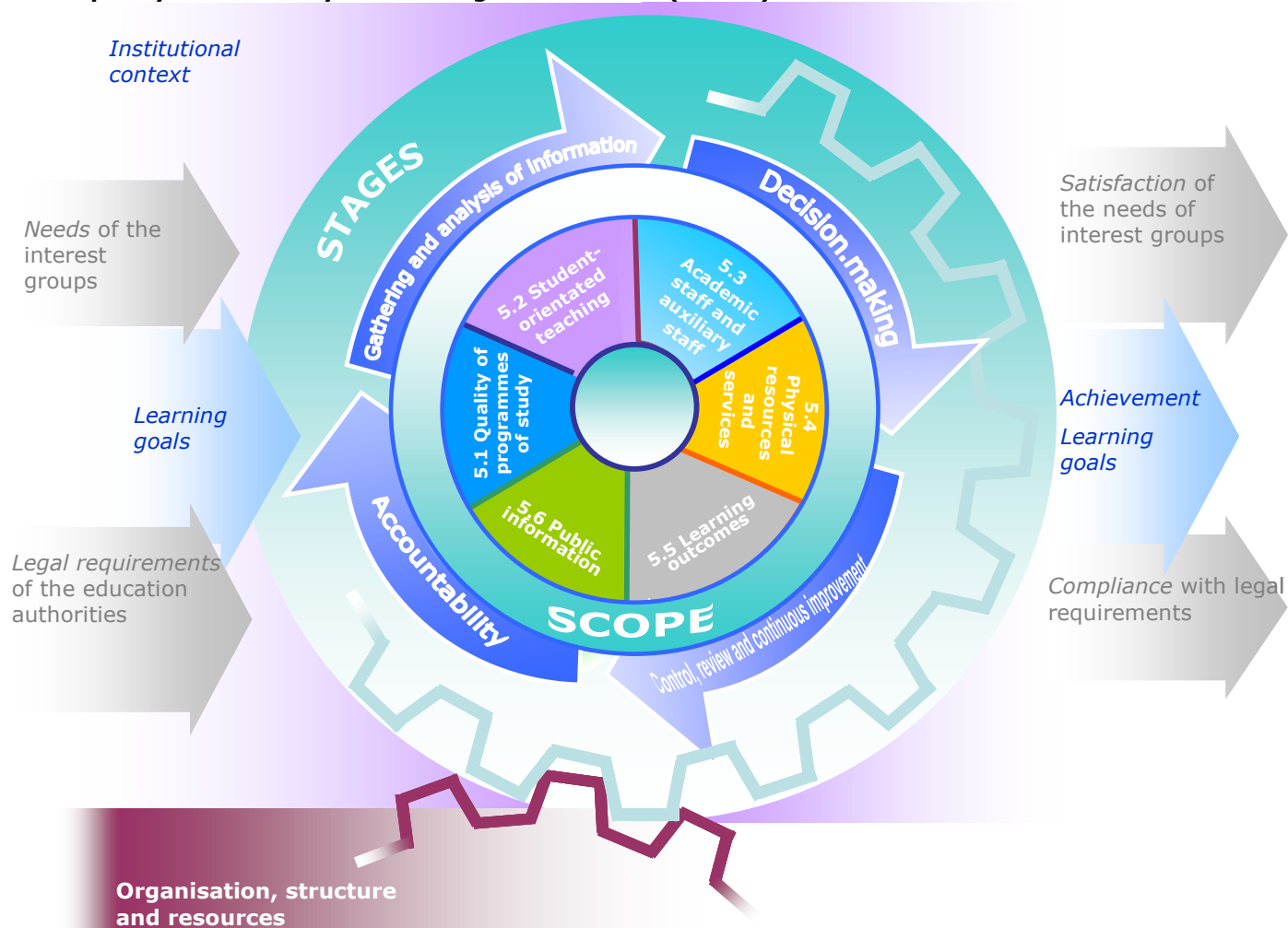
These aspects include:

- Organisation chart and structure of the HEI.
- Responsibilities and functions of the administrative and governing bodies, especially those associated with programmes of study.
- Academic staff and auxiliary teaching staff linked to the HEI.
- Committees and similar bodies that, within the scope of the HEI and departments, are involved in developing any processes.
- Regulations, protocols and procedures that already regulate the HEI's activities, especially those associated with the quality assurance of programmes of study.

In addition to the above, the HEI must take into consideration all resources and structures that have contributed to the quality assurance of programmes of study prior to the system being designed.

Figure 2 gives a graphical representation of the model proposed by AUDIT, in which a series of mechanisms is recurrently developed for each of the six elements considered in the scope, thereby allowing the inputs that start the development of the process to become transformed into a series of products or outputs, according to both the capacity of the institution's resources and the institutional framework in which it operates.

Figure 2 Internal quality assurance systems in higher education (AUDIT)



ANNEX:

Glossary

Academic staff: university staff members that carry out teaching and research activities.

Accreditation: the process whereby a QA agency ensures that degree programmes leading to recognised degree qualifications comply with the prerequisites for quality.

Administration and services staff: civil servant and auxiliary non-teaching staff that deal with the university's administration, management and services.

Continuous improvement: Concept used in management models, which involves the constant effort to improve quality.

Graduate employment programme: regulated project aimed at guiding final-year students to obtain their first job.

Guideline: series of instructions that help to understand an aspect of a model or system.

Interest group: Any person, group or institution with a stake in the HEI, degree programmes or outcomes obtained. These may include students, teachers, parents, education authorities, employers and society in general.

Mobility: possibility or action by students, teachers and administration and services staff to spend a period of time studying or working in another higher education institution either in the same country or abroad. In the case of students, the mobility programme must be linked to the requirement of the academic recognition of subjects studied during the stay.

Outcomes: the consequences of the processes associated with activities developed by the HEI.

Planning: process whereby the team, persons or bodies in charge of the degree programme design the strategies in order for its goals to be achieved (this must be systematic and periodic).

Process: a series of activities that are either mutually related or that interact, which transform inputs into outputs (ISO standard 9000:2000. Fundamentals and vocabulary).

Quality assurance system: a system consisting of the activities carried out by the HEI to assure the quality of its degree programmes, together with the relation that exists between these activities.

Quality assurance: all of these activities are aimed at internal and external quality assurance. In this case, it deals with the actions directed at the quality assurance of the degree programmes developed by the HEI, as well as generating and maintaining the trust of students, teachers and society.

Quality goals: a list of aspects, proposals and intentions to be achieved with the aim of enhancing the institution, programmes of study, unit or services that are assessed.

Quality policy: overall intentions and approach of an organisation relative to the quality of the service to users and interest groups.

Strategy: series of actions by the persons, team and/or body in charge, which is coordinated and aimed at achieving established goals.

Work experience: a group of training activities carried out by students in private enterprise or institutions to develop the practical and professional aspect of the programme of study. These may either be compulsory or voluntary, and may or may not be recognised in relation to the curriculum.