

Report of the panel of the external review of Unibasq

April 2014

0. Index

0. Index.....	2
1. Executive Summary	3
2. Glossary of acronyms	4
3. Introduction.....	5
3.1 Background and outline of the review process.....	5
3.2 The higher education system in Basque Country.....	5
3.3 Main functions of Unibasq	7
3.4. Structure of Unibasq	9
3.5 Unibasq and ENQA	10
3.6 The review process.....	10
3.7 The national context of the review	11
4. Findings.....	12
4.1 ENQA Criterion 1 / ESG 3.1 and ESG 3.3.....	12
4.2 ENQA criterion 2 / ESG 3.2: Official status	26
4.3 ENQA criterion 3 / ESG 3.4: Resources.....	27
4.4 ENQA criterion 4 / ESG 3.5: Mission statement	29
4.5 ENQA criterion 5 / ESG 3.6: Independence	30
4.6 ENQA Criterion 6 / ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies.....	32
4.7 ENQA Criterion 7 / ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures	34
4.8 ENQA criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims	36
5 Conclusion and development.....	37
6 Recommendations.....	37
7 Annexes	38

1. Executive Summary

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (Unibasq) with the ENQA Membership Criteria. The report is based on an ENQA coordinated type A peer review. Based on this report Unibasq will apply for Full membership of ENQA for the first time. Currently it is not a member nor an affiliate of ENQA. The site visit of the peer review panel in charge of the evaluation of the compliance with the ENQA Membership Criteria took place February 12-14 2014.

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence it considered, the Review Panel is satisfied that Unibasq is in substantial compliance with the ENQA Membership Provisions. The panel notes that the agency fully complies with the ENQA Membership criteria 2, 4 and 5 and 7; and substantially complies with criteria 1, 3 and 6 and 8.

Unibasq is a dynamic agency, which has developed its policies and procedures over the last number of years in order to fulfil the ENQA Membership Criteria. It performs a broad range of quality assurance activities, varying from the level of the individual professor and study programme to the level of university centres and complete institutions. For several evaluation schemes, cooperation exists with national and other regional quality assurance bodies.

Unibasq has developed close links both to the Basque Government and to the three universities which operate in the Basque Country and has built a high level of support for its activities.

The panel has also noted strong support from all stakeholders for Unibasq to become a Full Member of ENQA. Indeed, Spanish legislation states that full membership of ENQA is a necessary condition to take full responsibility for some evaluation schemes, such as the ex-ante accreditation and re-accreditation of university programmes.

2. Glossary of acronyms

ACSUG	Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia – Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System
ANECA	Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación – National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain
AQU Catalunya	Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya – Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
BOE	Boletín Oficial del Estado - Official Journal of Spain
BOPV	Boletín Oficial del País Vasco - Official Journal of the Basque Country
CNEAI	Comisión Nacional Evaluadora de la Actividad Investigadora – National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity
EHEA	European Higher Education Area)
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines (for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
LOU	Ley Orgánica de Universidades - Spanish Framework Law Governing Universities
LOMLOU	Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Universidades - Spanish Framework modifying the Law Governing Universities
PDCA	Plan-Do-Check-Act continuous improvement cycle
REACU	Red Española de Agencias de Calidad Universitaria – Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
RUCT	Registro de Universidades, Centros y Títulos - Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees
SIIU	Sistema Integrado de Información Universitaria - Integrated University Information System
UPV/EHU	Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea - University of the Basque Country

3. Introduction

This is the report of the review of Unibasq undertaken February 12-14 2014 for the purpose of determining whether the agency meets the criteria for Full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

3.1 Background and outline of the review process

The Statutes of ENQA require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the ESG should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its (then) regulations (now statutes). Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005. The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies.

The external review of Unibasq was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

The review panel for the external review of Unibasq was composed of the following members:

- Thierry Malan, Higher Education Consultant, former General Inspector for Administration of National Education and Research, France (Chairman)
- Pieter-Jan Van de Velde, Staff Member Quality Assurance, Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR), Belgium (Secretary)
- Maria João Machado Pires da Rosa, Assistant Professor, University of Aveiro – Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering (DEGEI), Researcher at CIPES - Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies, Portugal
- Gerard Wrixon, Immediate Past President University College, Cork, Ireland
- Cristina Pastor Valcárcel, Student in Actuarial and Financial Science, Miguel Hernández University, Elche, Spain

Unibasq produced a self-evaluation report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. The panel conducted a site-visit to validate fully the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue. The review panel has been given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review. It wishes to thank the members and staff of Unibasq for their welcome and good preparation of the site-visit, as well as the participants of the meetings who shared their experience with the panel.

3.2 The higher education system in Basque Country

The Basque Country (Euskadi in the Basque language) is one of Spain's Autonomous Communities, comprising 3 provinces located in the North of Spain. It has a strong linguistic and cultural identity of its own, with a population of about 2,180,000 inhabitants. Students can carry out their studies in the Basque or Spanish language. In addition, nowadays it includes English and some other languages.

The Basque University System comprises three multi-campus higher education institutions that have their main seat in the Basque territory. Each of them features a different kind of ownership:

- Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea - UPV/EHU is the only public university of the Basque Country; it operates as a university "system", with three campuses located in the three provinces of the Basque Country: Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba.
- Universidad de Deusto (Deusto University) is a private, not-for-profit HEI of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). It has two campuses in the Basque Country: in Bilbao and San Sebastian, and a Business School division in Madrid.
- Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Mondragon University) is a private, not-for-profit HEI that is organised as a cooperatively owned entity that was created in 1997 by means of the merger of previously existing education and training institutes.

Since the transition of the Spanish university system to the common features of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) from 2007 on, the structure of university studies in Spain has been in a process of change. In the new system aligned with the EHEA, Spanish universities now offer the same three cycles as in other countries: Bachelor degrees (in Spanish, Grado), Master degrees, and Doctoral degrees. The study programmes offered by the Basque University System cover all academic fields, all levels and all types of programmes.

Basque universities offer two types of study programmes:

- The so-called "official" programmes, which are those that underwent the ex-ante accreditation (called "verificación" in Spanish) and were formally "authorised" in the Autonomous Community where they are offered; these programmes are put on the national list of accredited programmes and lead to a degree that has administrative value "all over the Spanish territory"; nearly all undergraduate programmes belong to this category. The new accreditation procedure was not introduced at the same time for all levels of programmes: the "verification" of Doctoral programmes is only about to start, and there are still a significant number of "old" programmes, that are not yet adapted to the 3-tier structure of EHEA degrees and are still regulated by the former legislation; such programmes should be terminated within the coming few years and replaced by new ones that are in line with the EHEA degree structure and undergo the "verification" process;
- Programmes that lead to a diploma or qualification issued by the university itself, that are therefore called "títulos propios" (under the responsibility of the HEI itself, not the State); they may be for a very local audience or enjoy national/international prestige; such degrees exist in particular at Master level.

Table 1 offers information about the study programmes offered by each of the 3 universities in the Basque Country, which have already passed the ex-ante accreditation process.

Table 1

NUMBER OF STUDY PROGRAMMES	BACHELOR	MASTER	DOCTORATE	TOTAL
UPV/EHU	69	106	81	256
University of Deusto	19	31	10	60
Mondragon University	15	13	3	31
TOTAL	104	140	84	347

In the 2011-2012 academic year around 59,000 students were enrolled at Basque universities (of which 33523 were in new official study programmes); 79.4% of them were registered at the public University of the Basque Country.

The main body of academic staff in Spain are civil servants, full-time professors/researchers. Universities also employ professors/lecturers on a contractual full-time or part time basis. All staff needs to be previously evaluated and "accredited".

The national quality assurance agency ANECA is competent for this accreditation. Additionally, regional agencies are competent for the accreditation of contractual staff. In the Basque Country, the evaluation and accreditation of non-tenure professors is one of the assignments of Unibasq. In the Basque University System, in the 2011-2012 academic year, there were 5,373 lecturers and researchers, 82% of them at the public University of the Basque Country.

The legal framework which regulates the university policy in Spain has its origin in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and it falls to the State to lay down the basic regulations governing the implementation of article 27 of the Constitution, which recognizes university autonomy. The Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) of 21st December 2001, amended by Organic Law 4/2007 (LOMLOU) of 12th April 2007, sets down basic regulations on a national scale establishing the respective powers and competencies of universities, the national government and the governments of the different Autonomous Communities.

Together with the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country (1979), this legislation states that university policy is the exclusive responsibility of each Autonomous Community, which is liable for the creation, modification and termination of study programmes. The development of powers in the Basque Country was laid down in Law 3/2004 of 25th February 2004 in the Basque University System. This system is defined as consisting of universities established in the Basque Country, with details of the objectives and underlying principles; it also deals with university activity, which comprises teaching and research; it defines the university community as consisting of the student body, teaching and research staff, and administrative and service staff. It refers to the governing bodies and representation of the public universities, the legal status and academic and corporate governance of universities; it deals with the quality assurance of universities, it regulates certain economic aspects and the system of funding for the public university and, lastly, it created the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System.

The internal structure and overall functions of Unibasq are mainly determined by the Basque legislation. In keeping with the structure of Spanish state, with its strong, autonomous regions, the national system of external quality assurance consists of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and 10 regional agencies, of which Unibasq is one.

3.3 Main functions of Unibasq

Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System is a Basque state owned body governed by private law attached to the Basque Government's Department responsible for universities. Unibasq describes its mission in its self-evaluation report as follows:

Unibasq's mission is to help improve the Basque University System by promoting its quality and taking into account the interest groups involved in higher education. Its object is the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality of the Basque University System, in accordance with Spanish and international standards. Although it may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities outside the Basque Autonomous Community on the basis of prior agreements signed with different institutions.

The attainment of this object is achieved through the development of activities that:

- *Contribute to improving the quality of the Basque University System, in the aspects of teaching or learning, research and management.*
- *Provide information and criteria to the public administrations and the universities in their decision making processes.*
- *Offer information to the society on the work of the Basque University System.*

According to its statutes, Unibasq undertakes the following types of activities:

- a) Initial evaluation of university study programmes;*
- b) Institutional evaluation and certification;*
- c) Accreditation of studies and competencies within the European Qualifications Framework;*
- d) Evaluation and accreditation of academic staff's research and teaching activities;*
- e) Evaluation of the individual research merits of academic staff, for the purpose of allocating them additional remuneration, within the framework of the research objectives set by the Basque Government;*
- f) Evaluation of universities' research activities;*
- g) Elaboration of studies for the improvement and innovation of evaluation, certification and accreditation models;*
- h) Promotion of the evaluation and comparison of quality criteria within the European and international context;*
- i) Advice to government on matters regarding the quality of the Basque University System.*

Any other matter related to the Agency's purpose and area of activity, either at the Agency's own initiative or upon request by the governmental department responsible for universities.

In addition, Unibasq may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities at HEIs outside the Basque Autonomous Community. The Agency may also take part in the evaluation of other activities and agents within the Basque system of Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as outside the Basque Autonomous Community. Lastly, the agency may establish relations involving cooperation with other regional, national or foreign agencies that are responsible for quality assurance in higher education.

Unibasq performs a broad range of evaluations. The evaluation activities carried out by Unibasq until now may be divided into two main types: activities developed by the Agency itself, and activities developed jointly with other Spanish Quality Assurance Agencies.

A) Activities developed by Unibasq itself

Evaluation of study programmes:

- Ex-ante evaluation (called "autorización") of all new study programmes of Basque universities developed in accordance with the EHEA degree structure; a positive evaluation by Unibasq is required before the Basque government may approve a new "official" programme; this local requirement comes in addition to the national requirement that all new programmes need a positive ex-ante evaluation ("verificación") before they can become "official", i.e. with validity throughout the Spanish territory, and enter the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT). Unibasq organises ex-ante evaluation processes since 2006.
- Follow-up/monitoring of the implementation of all "official" study programmes of the Basque University System. After the courses for the study programmes entered in the RUCT are implemented, Unibasq monitors compliance with the project laid down in the validated study plan. This follow-up procedure has been implemented since 2010.
- Ex-post evaluation and accreditation of the programmes for the "renewal" of their status as official study programmes; this step is essentially equivalent to a re-accreditation (the initial accreditation is called "verification" rather than ex-ante accreditation). Pilots for this evaluation scheme are planned in 2014.
- External evaluation of the proposals for new study programmes of the UPV/EHU for which no official status will be sought (titulos propios); these programmes lead to a diploma awarded by the university itself, not by the State. This evaluation scheme is voluntary. It started in 2007.

Evaluation at institutional level:

- Reports on the fulfilment of the agreements (programme-contracts) signed between the Basque Government Department responsible for Universities and each university of the Basque University System, in view of the objectives established by government in the University Plan for the Basque Country. Unibasq prepares these reports annually since 2008.

Evaluation of academic staff on the basis of their teaching and research:

- Accreditation of teaching and research personnel to allow them to become eligible for contractual positions at public universities and for the position of "lecturing doctor" at private universities of the Basque University System (staff "Accreditation"). This evaluation scheme has been implemented in 2008 and has required a large part of personnel time in the past years.
- Evaluation of the teaching and research personnel of the public University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), in order to determine their share in the complementary payments ("bonus") set aside for this purpose by the Government of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Performance evaluation). This evaluation scheme ran from 2007 till 2010. Since then no new calls have been made.
- Evaluation of the permanently contracted teaching and research personnel of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) for the recognition of "sexenniums", i.e. the validation of six-year periods of research activity. This evaluation scheme started in 2010.

B) Activities in cooperation with other agencies:

Evaluation of Educational Institutions

- DOCENTIA – Scheme to support the universities in the designing of their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their academic staff. DOCENTIA was jointly designed with the national agency (ANECA) and all Spanish regional quality assurance agencies.
- AUDIT – Scheme for the evaluation and certification of the internal quality assurance systems of the Faculties of the Basque University System. AUDIT was jointly designed by ANECA and the regional accreditation agencies of Catalunya (AQU) and Galicia (ACSUG); Unibasq joined the scheme in 2007.

3.4. Structure of Unibasq

The Governing Board and the Director are the governing bodies of the agency. In the Act governing Unibasq (Act 13/2012), the composition of the Governing Board is defined. It must include representatives from the Basque Government, the rectors of the three Basque universities, one student (who must be elected by the specific body for the participation of Basque university students), one other person with recognized academic prestige, and six persons appointed by the Basque University Council (three of them working outside the Basque Autonomous Community, one of whom at least must work outside Spain and two must work outside the university community). The Governing Board is responsible for the governance of the agency in strategic and structural terms. The Director is responsible for management of the Agency, the representation of the Agency in the outside world, the appointment and dismissal of the members of the Advisory Board and of members of the Evaluation Committees, upon the recommendation of the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board and the Evaluation Committees are the technical bodies of the agency.

The members of the Advisory Board are the Agency's Director, who chairs it, and ten persons with a proven track record in academia or quality assurance who are appointed by the Agency's director. The majority of members of this Board must be from outside

the Basque University System. The Advisory Board must include at least one student, and three of its members must carry out their work outside Spain. Through its composition and the expertise of its members, the Advisory Board ensures the quality and credibility of the Agency's activities, by giving advice to the Governing Board and the Director on the performance of their functions, the development and approval of all the evaluation procedures and criteria to be used by the Agency, submission of proposals for the appointment and the dismissal of members of the Evaluation Committees, safeguard of the impartiality and objectivity of the evaluation, accreditation and certification procedures.

The Evaluation Committees are the scientific/technical bodies through which the Agency performs its evaluation, accreditation and certification functions. Each Evaluation Committee is made up of academics with a proven track record (a majority of them from outside the Basque University System), a student (in evaluation schemes that may have a direct impact on students), and wherever possible professionals with a proven track record in the knowledge area to be evaluated.

3.5 Unibasq and ENQA

Since 2009 the Agency has been preparing itself for the application to become a Full Member of ENQA, modifying where necessary the organizational and operational procedures, and promoting the required modifications in the legislation. In fact, the new Act of the Basque Country regulating the existence and statutes of Unibasq was passed with the specific objective of allowing the Agency to become an ENQA member and mandates this as a priority objective that Unibasq should achieve in the short term. This process has given rise to a deep reflection about compliance with the ESG and has stimulated the introduction of improvements in the organization and operations of the Agency.

During this review, the panel has noted strong support from all stakeholders for Unibasq to become a Full Member of ENQA. Indeed, Spanish legislation states that full membership of ENQA is a necessary condition to take full responsibility for some evaluation schemes, such as the ex-ante accreditation and re-accreditation of university programmes.

3.6 The review process

The panel was appointed in November 2013 and received the self-evaluation report at the same time. The self-evaluation report and its attachments were analysed by each of the panel members before the site visit and the Panel discussed the individual findings during its preparatory meeting, the first day of the site visit.

The site visit took place on February 12-14 2014 in the Unibasq offices in Vitoria/Gasteiz. Unibasq drew up the programme for the site visit in close cooperation with the chair and secretary of the panel. The programme included interview sessions with members of the Governing Board, representatives of the Basque Government, the Unibasq director and a number of staff members, representatives of the Advisory Board, representatives of the three Basque higher education institutions, student representatives and representatives of the Unibasq Evaluation Committees.

The self-evaluation report, its annexes and added documentation constituted the frame of reference for the interviews during the site visit, which in turn provided further oral evidence related to the written documentation.

The Panel appreciates the fact that a number of relevant documents, originally in Spanish or Basque, were provided in an English translation. One of the panel members is a Spanish native speaker and some of the other panel members master the Spanish language to an extent that they were able to analyse in detail the assessment protocols,

additional assessment and accreditation reports (to be found on Unibasq's web site). The findings about these documents have been shared to all panel members during internal meetings of the panel. At the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting where it agreed on the preliminary conclusions related to level of compliance of Unibasq in relation to each of the standards in part 2 and 3 of the ESG. The secretary of the panel then drafted the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel. The draft report was submitted to Unibasq for factual verification on March 25th 2014 and with reference to ENQA standards Unibasq was given two weeks to comment on the report.

In relation to its conclusions, the Panel finds it important to note that it has assessed Unibasq's level of compliance with the standards and also taken into account Unibasq's practice in relation to some of the indicators listed in the guidelines. It has also provided a number of recommendations. It is the ambition of the panel that this approach reflects the new policy for external reviews of agencies decided by the ENQA Board which came into effect on July 1st 2011. The policy states (among other things) that the enhancement aspect of the reviews shall be strengthened in the second round and the agency thus be given more recommendations for further development than in the first round of reviews.

3.7 The national context of the review

In Spain activities related to the external quality assurance procedures are within the competence of the national quality assurance agency ANECA and the responsible local assessment bodies established by regional law. The amendment to the law on universities – law 4/2007 of 12 April (LOMLOU) - establishes that ANECA and the regional bodies shall, in the application of international standards, establish mechanisms for cooperation and mutual recognition.

Ten of the 17 regions in Spain have established a regional agency for quality assurance. These agencies are responsible for the external quality assurance within their territory. Spanish legislation states that full membership of ENQA is a necessary condition to take full responsibility for some evaluation schemes, such as the ex-ante accreditation and re-accreditation of university programmes. Four regional agencies are full member of ENQA: AAC-DEVA - Andalusian Agency of Knowledge, Department of Evaluation and Accreditation, Sevilla; ACSUCYL - Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León, Valladolid; ACSUG - Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System, Santiago de Compostela; and AQU Catalunya - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, Barcelona. As indicated before, Unibasq is committed to become a full member of ENQA, too.

The relationship between the regional agencies and ANECA is determined by national and regional laws. ANECA and the regional agencies collaborate within the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU). Unibasq has been an active member of the REACU network since its inception in 2006.

4. Findings

The following judgments are based on the self-evaluation document, analysis of additional documents and the Unibasq website, and interviews during the site visit (the schedule is attached in Annex 1). The Review Panel is grateful for Unibasq's very open approach, which facilitated free and frank communication in all interviews.

The Panel considers that Unibasq is a dynamic agency oriented towards the development of a quality culture in the Basque Higher Education system. In recent years Unibasq has gained much support from the three universities as well as from the Basque Government. Unibasq has also created an atmosphere of trust with all three Universities.

Unibasq has developed over the past years a broad range of evaluation schemes, often together with other Spanish quality assurance agencies. It is strongly committed to further increase its role in the Basque Higher Education system and in the broader Basque society.

The panel supports Unibasq's ambition to become a full member of ENQA and is convinced that this membership will allow the agency not only to take up additional responsibilities which the Spanish law reserves for full members of ENQA, but also to play a more active role in the European Higher Education Area.

4.1 ENQA Criterion 1 / ESG 3.1 and ESG 3.3

a. ESG 3.1 - Part 2: External quality assurance processes

STANDARD:

The external quality assurance agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance procedures described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

Findings of the panel

Compliance with the standards of Part 2 of the ESG is addressed in the following sections. Compliance with these standards is only relevant with regard to the overall compliance with standard 3.1.

4.1.1 – ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

STANDARD:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

Findings of the panel

Unibasq's current core activities relate to the approval and follow-up of study programmes, to voluntary evaluation schemes for the quality of academic staff teaching activity (DOCENTIA) and internal quality assurance (AUDIT) and to staff accreditation and evaluation. The procedures as they have been used up to now are not always focused on the requirements of Part 1 of the ESG. Some aspects are mainly evaluated within voluntary evaluation schemes. The re-accreditation framework takes the elements of the Part 1 of the ESG into account explicitly.

In the following paragraphs the panel describes to which extent the external quality assurance procedures used by Unibasq assess the effectiveness of higher education institutions' internal quality assurance processes in relation to the standards described in Part 1 of the ESG.

ESG 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance

Unibasq has procedures in place to check whether institutions have a policy and procedures for quality assurance in place. This element is taken into account in the mandatory procedures at programme level (ex-ante accreditation, follow-up and re-accreditation). Additionally the voluntary evaluation scheme AUDIT helps centres and faculties of the Basque universities to develop sound internal quality assurance systems.

ESG 1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

In the Spanish university system, two types of programmes co-exist: official study programmes, recognized by the Spanish Government and so-called 'titulos propios', or own programmes which are offered under the responsibility of the HEI itself.

For official study programmes, an extensive system of external quality assurance processes for approval, monitoring and periodic review of the programmes is in place. At the start of each new programme both an ex-ante accreditation by Unibasq and an ex-ante evaluation by ANECA are required. As soon as the programme is implemented, an annual follow-up procedure is in place and after 4 (for master's degrees) and 6 years (for bachelor's and doctoral degrees) re-accreditation is required. The system of re-accreditation will be implemented from 2014 on.

For 'titulos propios' the full responsibility lies with the HEI. For the own programmes of the public university UPV-EHU a voluntary ex-ante accreditation procedure is organised by Unibasq.

Furthermore, the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards is a crucial element in the voluntary evaluation scheme AUDIT. Nearly all university centres from the three Basque universities are involved in AUDIT.

ESG 1.3 Assessment of students

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. Assessment of students is considered in several of the evaluation schemes Unibasq applies. The panel appreciates that within the framework for 'titulos propios' and within the re-accreditation assessment framework which will be implemented in 2014, a specific criterion relates to the assessment of students. Within the ex-ante accreditation procedure reviewers could formulate suggestions on the assessment of students, but it is not a separate question of evaluation. Within AUDIT and DOCENTIA assessment of students is a (sub)criterion to be evaluated. Overall, the panel suggests to evaluate the design and implementation of assessment policies more systematically in all relevant evaluation schemes.

ESG 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff

Quality assurance of teaching staff is central in the work of Unibasq. Unibasq both evaluates individual staff and assesses the quality of teaching teams and staff policy within several evaluation schemes.

As a condition to apply for any contractual position at a Basque university, accreditation by Unibasq is necessary. For civil servants' positions, ANECA is in charge of accreditation. Unibasq also organises six-annual evaluations of the performance of the teaching staff of the Basque universities. For positions with a civil servant status evaluation is organised by CNEAI on a national level. For contractual staff, Unibasq coordinates the calls for evaluation and presents the applications to the CNEAI Evaluation Committees for evaluation.

Furthermore, Unibasq is one of the agencies implementing the DOCENTIA scheme which supports universities in designing their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their academic staff. Also within the AUDIT scheme, quality assurance of teaching staff is one of the key elements.

Within the ex-ante accreditation procedure performed by Unibasq the focus is on equal opportunities within personnel policy, in order to avoid duplication with the ex-ante evaluation performed by ANECA which does take into account the quality of teaching staff more in detail. In the re-accreditation procedure, quality assurance of teaching staff is taken into account explicitly.

ESG 1.5 Learning resources and student support

Within the ex-ante accreditation procedure, Unibasq evaluates only the use of ICT explicitly, in order to avoid duplication with the ex-ante evaluation procedure of ANECA which does take other aspects into account. In the re-accreditation procedure learning resources and student support are evaluated. This is also the case within the AUDIT evaluation framework.

ESG 1.6 Information systems

At study programme level, the ex-ante accreditation evaluates data about economic feasibility and societal needs and the follow-up procedure takes into account the analysis of data related to student performance. Within the planned re-accreditation procedure the information the study programme gathers and the way it follows up on this information is taken into account in the evaluation.

In AUDIT the collection, analysis and use of relevant information for the effective management of study programmes is an explicit criterion for evaluation. In DOCENTIA information about the quality of teaching is gathered and evaluated.

ESG 1.7 Public information

Public information plays a crucial role in the external quality assurance processes of Unibasq. It is a central criterion within the follow-up procedure of ex-ante accreditation: institutions have to publish both their own follow-up reports and the assessment of these reports by Unibasq on their website at the same page where they provide other information to students. As a consequence of this focus on public information, students see strong improvements in the quality and quantity of information provided by the HEI on their websites.

Also in AUDIT, public information is a criterion for evaluation.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should re-evaluate whether the assessment of students could be evaluated more systematically within the different evaluation schemes.
- Unibasq should also focus its mandatory evaluation schemes on the compliance of the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions with Part I of the ESG.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 2.1.

4.1.2 - ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

STANDARD:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

Findings of the panel

The aims and objectives of the evaluation schemes developed by Unibasq are determined before the processes themselves are developed. These objectives are clearly stated in the protocols developed per evaluation scheme, which are published in the Official Bulletin of the Basque Country. All agreed procedures and criteria for evaluation are published beforehand on the Agency's website.

The definition of the external evaluation schemes is done by the Agency's technical staff in consultation with the Unibasq Advisory Board, which defines the aims and objectives, in agreement with Spanish and regional law and regulations. In the Advisory Board students, professionals, international experts in the field of higher education and academics of the three Basque universities are represented, although they do not represent their institutions, but act in their own name. The panel appreciates that for the development of the re-accreditation procedures, a working group with staff representation from the three Basque universities was created in order to propose to Unibasq a list of the most appropriate indicators and evidences needed for the re-

accreditation of the study programmes. Furthermore Unibasq holds periodic meetings with the institutions undergoing evaluation in order to discuss the aims, objectives and procedures of the evaluation schemes. During these meetings also input is gathered for new evaluation schemes. The panel appreciates that Unibasq plans to involve students more systematically in the development of new procedures through the Students Consultative Board. Probably also other stakeholders could be involved more actively, next to their representation in the Advisory Board, in the development of procedures.

Moreover, to ensure that the procedures to be adopted fit the pre-defined purposes, the Agency has carried out two pilot projects within the framework of the AUDIT and Follow-up schemes, and a third one will be implemented shortly for the re-accreditation scheme. The obtained results provide valuable information that enables the identification of opportunities for improvement. Also, the outcomes help define the necessary measures to better achieve the objectives of the processes. The review panel appreciates those initiatives. Based on the feedback from higher education institution representatives, DOCENTIA seems to be the evaluation scheme which is the least fit for purpose and relatively bureaucratic.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should consider how stakeholders involvement could be further increased in the development of procedures, next to their representation in the Advisory Board.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 2.2.

4.1.3 ESG 2.3 - Criteria for decisions

STANDARD:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

Findings of the panel

The rules for evaluation procedures and the general evaluation criteria are always made public on the Agency's website, before the implementation of the evaluation. For each evaluation scheme, Unibasq designs and implements a specific protocol. This document establishes the procedures and criteria to be used in the evaluation scheme.

Each evaluation scheme is implemented by an Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committees play a crucial role in guaranteeing consistency in decision making. These committees consist of mainly Spanish academics (from outside the Basque Country), and where relevant a student. Each evaluation committee is responsible for all evaluation reports which are published. In cases where external assessors are involved who do not form part of the evaluation committee (e.g. ex-ante accreditation of study programmes), one of the members presents the findings of the external assessors and proposes a summary report and a decision to the full committee. The evaluations of different experts are compared, verifying that the evaluation criteria are being applied coherently. In case of divergence, the President takes the necessary action to resolve the situation.

Next to internal discussions within evaluation committees, a second important measure to guarantee consistency is the training of all experts at the beginning of each evaluation process. These sessions provide training on the procedure to be performed, the items to be evaluated and the criteria to be applied.

As a third measure to guarantee consistency, the Agency staff assures that the process fits with the established criteria and procedure.

The review panel finds the measures taken to guarantee consistency in decision making about evaluations satisfactory. Nevertheless, the panel was surprised to find out that no formal exchange is organised between the Evaluation Committee for the AUDIT programme with the evaluation committees of other agencies implementing the same evaluation scheme. Although the panel understands that the final decisions are the sole responsibility of each Agency, exchange could benefit the consistent implementation in the whole country.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 2.3.

4.1.4 ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

STANDARD:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

Findings of the panel

The general composition of the evaluation committees is defined in Act 13/2013, governing Unibasq. The Advisory Board approved the requirements for **selecting** Unibasq's experts which are published on the Agency's website. Generally experts are selected based on an open call. The Advisory Board analyses the candidates' curricula and proposes members of the evaluation committees to the Director for their appointment, taking into account a balanced composition of the committees. Only in case no experts in a specific field replied to the call, the Agency contacts experts pro-actively.

This doesn't happen often, as the Agency has a pool of over 1000 experts who have been assessed by the Advisory Board (at the moment of the site visit, 57 experts were participating in one of the evaluation committees). Most of the experts are or have recently been active in Spanish higher education institutions (outside the Basque Country).

Prior to the implementation of the evaluation activities Unibasq provides the experts with briefing and **training** and, if necessary, further informative sessions are held throughout the evaluation processes. During the training process, the agency provides the experts with information about evaluation management, guidelines for elaborating reports, explanations about the evaluation guides etc. All members of evaluation committees the panel has spoken are positive about the training they receive.

As regards the use of **international experts**, both the Governing Board and the Advisory Board include several international members. However, in the evaluation committees which perform the actual evaluations nearly no international experts are involved. The review panel suggests to develop procedures which guarantee the involvement of international experts in the actual reviews. Foreign experts who master the Spanish language should be easy to find. Probably there are also Basque academics who currently work abroad who are willing to perform evaluations for Unibasq in cases where knowledge of the Basque language is required.

Unibasq pays special attention to the participation of **students**. The Basque Country Act 13/2013, governing Unibasq, establishes that the evaluation committees are composed of, among others, "students from the areas to be assessed, in the evaluation of programmes and activities that may have a direct impact on students; student members are appointed by the specific body for the participation of Basque university students". Students have been participating in several of Unibasq schemes, in particular in DOCENTIA, AUDIT and the evaluation of study programmes. In addition, students participate as full members in the Governing Board and the Advisory Board of the Agency, as key agents in the quality assurance of higher education. The panel appreciates the efforts for the systematic involvement of students in evaluation procedures related to study programmes and quality assurance processes. The panel understands that it is not always easy to appoint students on the evaluation committees. The panel appreciates that a specific student body has been established to promote student participation and that an agreement has been signed with this students body. The panel encourages Unibasq to implement flexible procedures for the appointment of students in order to ensure a stable and regular participation of students.

Unibasq has developed several evaluation schemes. Not all evaluation schemes use the self-evaluation, site visit, draft report, final report, and follow-up **model of review**.

At study programme level, up to now, all procedures are paper-based. No direct exchange between those responsible for the study programme and the reviewer(s) takes place. In the ex-ante accreditation procedure, those responsible for the programme submits an application to Unibasq. Although this is called a self-evaluation report, the panel judges this merely as an information file. On the basis of the assessors' evaluation of the file, a draft report is prepared. A study programme has the opportunity to react before the report is finalized. The report is not published on the Unibasq website. The final decision is made by the Basque Government based on this report together with the ex-ante evaluation report by ANECA. A specific follow-up procedure, with published reports, is in place. Starting in 2014, a re-accreditation procedure will be implemented. This new procedure will follow the full model of review, including self-evaluation, site visit and public report.

At institutional level the voluntary evaluation schemes AUDIT and DOCENTIA consist of several steps, from the design of the system and its implementation, over annual follow-up of the implementation, until the full certification upon successful implementation. Only in the certification phase does a site visit takes place.

The representatives of the institutions with whom the panel have spoken all indicate that they find the model of review adequate. They also find the interaction with the reviewers satisfactory. Nevertheless, the panel suggests Unibasq to reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation schemes. Firstly, the panel finds great variations in the self-critical aspects of self-evaluation reports. Unibasq facilitates the self-evaluation process through the development of a 'Self-report model for study programme follow-up' and a 'Guide for the self-evaluation of study programmes. Nevertheless, in the opinion of the review panel it should continue to insist on a self-critical approach, as this is crucial to improve the impact of external quality assurance. This element should also be taken into account in the implementation of the re-accreditation procedures. Secondly, the panel suggests to consider the introduction of site visits where these aren't used yet. Site visits could add value to the peer review procedures. Indeed, active interaction between peers is often seen as the main added value of external quality assurance processes. This interaction seems to be limited in the current procedures. Thirdly, all reports should be published and include enough information for the lay reader to understand the evaluation (see ESG 2.5).

For evaluation and accreditation of staff, evaluation is always based on a file submitted by the person who wants to be evaluated. Based on the evaluation of this file a draft report is sent to the applicant. The applicant may react on this report before it is finalized. No public reports are issued, as the content of the reports is subject to privacy regulations. The review panel finds this an adequate review model for the evaluation and accreditation of staff.

Unibasq implements AUDIT and DOCENTIA in order to support **institutional improvement and enhancement** policies, which can serve as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality. Next to these evaluation schemes at centre or institutional level, the external evaluation schemes at study programme level are primarily focused on quality improvement. The review panel finds this approach adequate.

Finally, the review panel signals that, although representatives of the institutions had a clear positive overall evaluation on the evaluation schemes Unibasq implements, they indicated that the DOCENTIA scheme should be revised to make it less bureaucratic and thus more fit-for-purpose. Due to the work load for individual staff members to provide the necessary data for DOCENTIA, the willingness to participate is low. Although improvements have been noticed, a significant reduction of the administrative burden seems to be necessary to create a general acceptance of the DOCENTIA scheme. As this scheme is a common scheme with other Spanish agencies, the review of DOCENTIA should be done in cooperation with those agencies.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should implement flexible procedures for the selection process of students in evaluation committees in order to guarantee maximal student participation.
- Unibasq should reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation schemes.
- Unibasq should continue to monitor that the self-evaluation reports are of a self-critical nature.
- Unibasq should initiate a review of the DOCENTIA procedures in order to reduce the administrative burden of this evaluation scheme in cooperation with other Spanish agencies.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 2.4.

4.1.5 ESG 2.5 Reporting

STANDARD:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

Findings of the panel

The evaluation reports are elaborated by the different Evaluation Committees. The structure of the reports follows the guides, templates, protocols and criteria previously established. In general, the reports are structured with an introduction where the objective of the report, a description and analysis of the performed activity containing the conclusions, commendations and recommendations for enhancement are laid out.

The evaluation reports are communicated directly to the interested party, as follows:

- Evaluation of study programmes and reports on the Follow-up and Monitoring of study programmes: the final evaluation reports are communicated to the evaluated party and to the Basque Government Department responsible for universities. In addition, the reports on the Follow-up of study programmes are published on the Agency's website.
- Reports on institutional evaluation, in both DOCENTIA and AUDIT schemes: the reports are published on the website after having been communicated to the evaluated institution.
- Teaching staff evaluation: since these are individual evaluations, only the person in question is informed about the outcome of the evaluation. This procedure is in line with the legal framework concerning personal data.

Based on the discussions the panel had during the site visit, it is clear that the intended readership of the reports Unibasq publishes is limited to the Government and the evaluated party. The panel suggests to consider broadening the intended readership of the reports.

Universities and the Basque Government give positive feedback on the usefulness of the published reports. The review panel supports the positive evaluation, as far as it comes to suggestions for improvement. In all reports the panel has read, clear suggestions are formulated for further quality improvement.

Nevertheless, reports should give - next to suggestions for improvement - clear justification for the conclusions they state. Although the justification of conclusions seems to be clear to the HEI, in most of the reports the panel reviewed a clear justification of the conclusions is lacking. The panel urges Unibasq to review its evaluation procedures in order to guarantee that all key findings leading to a positive or negative conclusion are stated explicitly in the reports. Probably, this would also help to make the reports more understandable for a broader readership, which is not involved on a daily basis with the unit of evaluation.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should integrate the key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly in its reports.
- Unibasq should consider to broaden the intended readership of its reports.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq partially complies with ESG 2.5.

4.1.6 ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures

STANDARD:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

Findings of the panel

Unibasq develops follow-up activities when the performed quality assurance processes contain recommendations for action or require a subsequent action plan.

Official study programmes

The Spanish legal framework requires that the Quality Assurance Agencies must perform a periodic follow-up of the "official" study programmes (those leading to a degree with validity throughout the Spanish territory). This monitoring process is based on available public information and on information the universities acquire through the implementation of an Internal Quality Assurance System, until the moment when they have to submit the proposal for the ex-post accreditation. At that stage, a new cycle begins.

One part of the study programme follow-up consists of analysing if the universities have carried out improvement actions in response to the recommendations established in the external evaluation reports of the scheme in question (verification, authorisation, monitoring and AUDIT reports which are available for the experts participating in the follow-up), and if they have taken action to the follow-up the recommendations made, or if they have a suitable justification for not having performed such improvement actions.

Unibasq assesses only a sample of the annual monitoring reports, some selected according pre-established criteria, and some randomly. It therefore cannot be

guaranteed that all recommendations are considered, or that Unibasq has checked what has been done in all cases. Nevertheless, HEI are anyway required to publish the self-evaluation reports on the follow-up of each study programme on their website, together with other information for students. This allows the broader public to analyse the follow-up measures taken by the study programme.

AUDIT and DOCENTIA

Unibasq performs the monitoring of entities evaluated under the AUDIT and DOCENTIA in accordance with the procedures for these schemes elaborated in conjunction with the other participating agencies. After a positive evaluation of the Internal Quality Management System the system is implemented. Unibasq certifies the proper implementation of internal quality assurance systems; such certification must be renewed every five years. During this period a monitoring process is organised. In addition, during the follow-up of the study programmes, the implementation of their Internal Quality Assurance System is reviewed.

In the DOCENTIA scheme, after a positive evaluation of the Evaluation Procedure of the University Teaching staff, Unibasq monitors the implementation for at least two years and, in the third year of implementation, the Certificate can be issued.

Staff evaluation

Within the procedures of staff evaluation no follow-up role is assigned to Unibasq. The follow-up is the responsibility of the higher education institution.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 2.6.

4.1.7 ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews

STANDARD:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

Findings of the panel

In the evaluation of study programmes (ex-ante accreditation, follow-up and re-accreditation) as well as in the evaluation of educational institutions (AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes), the evaluation is implemented on a cyclical basis, with periods of evaluation previously defined and established on beforehand for each evaluation scheme.

The Spanish regulation establishes that before a study programme may be implemented it needs an ex ante evaluation. This accreditation must be renewed every 6 years in the case of Bachelor (grado) and Doctoral degrees, and every 4 years in the case of Master degrees. In between the ex-ante accreditation and the re-accreditation Unibasq conducts a follow-up of the implementation of the study programme (See ESG 2.6).

In AUDIT once the implementation of the internal quality assurance system is certified, there will be a periodic follow-up. The certification has to be renewed every five years. This stage of the scheme is currently in the pilot phase. In DOCENTIA Unibasq evaluates the design of the teaching activity evaluation. Once the designs are favourably evaluated, the university must start the experimental implementation of these evaluations. During this stage a follow-up is conducted and once favourably passed, the university receives the certification of the evaluation procedures. After the certification, a cyclical evaluation is established.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 2.7.

4.1.8 ESG 2.8 System-wide analyses

STANDARD:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

GUIDELINES:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems.

Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

Findings of the panel

In line with this standard, the Act governing the Unibasq specifies that it should provide Basque society with information about the result of its activities; it should also provide public administrations, universities and other educational or scientific-technological agents with information and guidelines for their decision-making processes in the functional areas of the agency. Although Unibasq has organised two Symposia under the name "The quality of the Basque Country university system: a commitment by all" and "The quality of the Basque Country university system: the users' viewpoint", it recognizes as an area for improvement the elaboration of results reports with additional information. Indeed, the Symposia Unibasq organised were more related to information on its own functioning and to the stakeholder involvement about the procedures it implements, rather than on the content of the findings of reviews. The review panel insists that Unibasq should invest more in system-wide analyses of the Basque University System. In order to do so, Unibasq will need to find additional resources.

Within Spain, Unibasq has taken several initiatives in cooperation with other Spanish Quality Assurance Agencies. Since 2008, it participates in the drafting of a report on the status of external quality assessment of Spanish universities. Furthermore, Unibasq organised the annual national public event for the presentation of certificates granted to Spanish higher education entities with a positive evaluation in the AUDIT scheme in 2012. In 2013 Unibasq organised together with other Spanish quality assurance agencies "The 1st Conference on Best Practices in the DOCENTIA scheme". Unibasq and the other Spanish quality assurance agencies are working together to design the new Integrated University Information System (SIIU). The aim of this SIIU is to define a set of indicators

in the Spanish University System that are of quality, reliable, and that accurately reflect reality. The panel appreciates these initiatives.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should use the general findings of its external quality assurance processes more as a basis for system-wide analyses on the Basque University System.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq partially complies with ESG 2.8.

4.1.9 Findings of the panel in relation to ESG 3.1

Unibasq has been created in 2004 as Uniqua. In the year 2009, a process of changes was started on the initiative of the Agency with a view to adapting its statutes and operations to the ESG. As a result of this extensive process the Agency Statutes were changed (in January 2011) and the new name of Unibasq was adopted. However, this search for European compatibility also made it clear that only a new law could introduce all the necessary changes and guarantee the Agency's status as an independent, professional body. This major leap forwards was made possible in 2012 thanks to the adoption of the Basque Country Act governing Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System. Under the umbrella of the new Law the Agency developed new Statutes that were approved by the Basque Government in May 2013. Based on its analysis of documents provided and meetings with the stakeholders involved in the work of Unibasq, the panel concludes that Unibasq has improved the quality of its work substantially over the past years. It has implemented a broad range of evaluation schemes and stands at the verge of the re-accreditation procedure at study programme level which complements the existing procedures. The Agency is broadly recognized as contributing to the quality culture in the Basque university system. Although the panel indicates a number of areas for improvement in relation to Part 2 of the ESG, the panel is convinced that the external quality assurance activities of the agency take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG satisfactorily.

Unibasq complies fully with ESG 2.3 and 2.6 and 2.7.

Unibasq complies substantially with ESG 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4.

Unibasq complies partially with ESG 2.5 and 2.8.

Conclusion on ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 3.1.

b. ESG 3.3: Activities

STANDARD:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

GUIDELINES:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

Findings of the panel

Unibasq is responsible for the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System. Since 2006, Unibasq has regularly developed activities related to external quality assurance.

At study programme level, Unibasq is responsible for ex-ante accreditation and follow-up procedures of all official Bachelor (Grado), Master and Doctoral study programmes. Starting from 2014 it will be involved in re-accreditation processes of all official study programmes in the Basque Country. Bachelor and Doctoral programmes need to be re-accredited every 6 years, Master programmes need to be re-accredited every 4 years. Furthermore, Unibasq organises voluntary assessments of new "titulos propios" of the University of the Basque Country UPV.

At institutional level, Unibasq implements the nation-wide voluntary systems AUDIT and DOCENTIA for the Basque university system. Unibasq also organises annually evaluations of programme contracts between universities and the Basque Government.

One of the specific features of the Spanish university system is the external evaluation of teaching and research staff to be conducted by the quality evaluation agencies. ANECA is responsible for those activities for civil servants. Regional agencies can take up roles in the evaluation of contractual staff. This activity is focused on two different kinds of evaluations. The first activity, involving a high workload for Unibasq, is the evaluation of teaching and research staff for their accreditation, which is a precondition to obtaining a work contract at a university. Calls are launched annually. The second activity is the evaluation of the performance of the teaching and research staff. Academic staff needs to be evaluated every six years ("sexenniums"). For civil servants this evaluation is organised by CNEAI at national level. For contractual staff, Unibasq coordinates the calls for evaluation and presents the applications to CNEAI Evaluation Committees for evaluation.

Next to the activities in the Basque Country, Unibasq can implement schemes regarding the evaluation of research activities and projects outside the Basque Country. In this sense, in 2013 Unibasq has agreed to evaluate the applications for two postdoctoral positions in the University of the Balearic Islands. The panel suggests Unibasq to take a more pro-active role in attracting this kind of activities. This provides the agency and its staff with a broader background and new experiences, which can contribute to the positive development of its work in the Basque Country. The panel encourages Unibasq to implement the plans to cooperate with Latin America, which were mentioned during the site visit.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.3.

Conclusion on ENQA Criterion 1

Taking into account that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 3.1 and that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.3, the panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ENQA criterion 1.

4.2 ENQA criterion 2 / ESG 3.2: Official status

STANDARD:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

Findings of the panel

The Basque Act 13/2012, dated 28th June 2012, governs Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System. Article 2 of this Act establishes as the Agency’s aim “the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System, taking into consideration its Spanish, European and international dimensions”.

The purposes of the Agency are:

- a) To promote and ensure quality throughout the Basque University System, taking into consideration the Spanish, European and international contexts.
- b) To help improve the quality of the Basque University System.
- c) To provide society with information about the results of the Agency’s activities.
- d) To provide public administrations, universities and other educational or scientific-technological stakeholders with information and guidelines for their decision-making processes in the functional areas of the Agency.

In compliance with the new Law, Decree 204/2013 was adopted on 16th April 2013 to approve the Statutes of Unibasq.

Unibasq performs its functions within the legal form of a public entity submitted to private law and linked to the Basque Government’s department responsible for universities. It is a legal entity in its own right, with full capacity to act and with complete control over its own resources for the purpose of performing its functions.

So, Unibasq is clearly recognized by the competent authority and has an established legal basis.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.2, and thus fully complies with ENQA Criterion 2.

4.3 ENQA criterion 3 / ESG 3.4: Resources

STANDARD:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

Findings of the panel

The annual budget of Unibasq amounts to 963,035 euro in 2014, which comes mostly from the Government of the Basque Country. Under 10 percent of the incomes comes from other sources, such as national and international projects and assessment fees from the academic staff evaluation programme.

Due to the economic crisis and also to a reduction of workload in several evaluation programmes, the budget fell gradually back from 1.7 million euro in 2007. According to the Unibasq Board and staff, the available budget has been sufficient for the Agency to develop its activities according to its mandate over the past years. Nevertheless, based on the discussions the panel had during its site visit, it concludes that the current budget is minimal for Unibasq in order to perform all its functions.

The legal framework (Act 13/2012) establishes that the general budget of the Basque Autonomous Community shall allocate to the Agency the resources it needs to perform its functions in accordance with a multi-annual programme-contract. This new model of financing will come into operation from 2014. The special feature of this system is that it lays down the principle that funding is linked to the fulfilment of certain objectives. The Governing Board approves the programme-contract according to Unibasq's strategic plan. Unibasq provides information on an annual basis about the expenditure incurred and the extent of fulfilment of the aforementioned objectives. The panel appreciates this approach, which helps the Agency to plan for the medium term and which reduces the dependence from annual Government budgeting processes.

At the moment of the site visit of the panel, Unibasq was negotiating this 4-year contract with the Basque Government. Unibasq indicated that it had hopes to receive an increase in the annual contribution provided by the Basque Government. Taking into account the likelihood of an increase in the workload, primarily linked with the implementation of re-accreditation procedures and possibly with a new call for performance evaluations of academic staff, an increase of the budget is clearly needed in the opinion of the panel for the coming years. Indeed, an increase is also necessary because the current budget does not allow sufficient time for investment in activities linked to system-wide analyses and participation in international activities.

The panel suggests Unibasq try to diversify its incomes in order to become less dependent on the Basque Government. Offering services to universities outside of the Basque Country is an interesting option; the evaluation of the applications for two postdoctoral positions in the University of the Balearic Islands is a first step in this direction. The panel also supports the ambitions of the Agency to broaden its field of activities within the Basque Country, e.g. to evaluation activities for technological centres.

About half of the budget is spent on staff. The Agency currently has a staff of 10 people. This consists of the Director, the deputy director and eight other employees working under permanent contract; five are technical specialists and three are administrative assistants. The number of permanent staff has been stable over the past years despite the diminution of the general budget. The panel gained the impression that Unibasq staff

members are motivated and professional. University representatives considered their Unibasq contacts competent and service-orientated. Members of committees feel well supported by the staff.

Accommodation and IT facilities are appropriate to enable the staff to fulfil their responsibilities. Nevertheless, taking into account the planned increase in workload, and thus in number of staff, the current premises are too small. Therefore the Agency is considering moving to a bigger office.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should try to diversify its income in order to become less dependent from the Basque Government funding.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 3.4, and thus substantially complies with ENQA Criterion 3.

4.4 ENQA criterion 4 / ESG 3.5: Mission statement

STANDARD:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

GUIDELINES:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Findings of the panel

Unibasq's mission is "To help improve the Basque University System by promoting its quality and taking into account the interest groups involved in higher education". Together with the mission statement of the Agency, the vision, values and ethics which must guide the performance of Agency staff and all the individuals that collaborate with it, have been drawn up.

The mission is included in the Agency's four year Strategic Plan (published on its website), which was approved by the Unibasq Governing Board on 28th February 2013, after being proposed by the Advisory Board. Stakeholder involvement in the development of the Strategic Plan takes place via their participation in the Advisory Board. The 3 Basque Universities are represented in the Governing Board and have thus been involved through this body.

The Strategic Plan of the Agency includes 6 strategic axes in which the agency will focus its mission to develop in the next four years:

- Axis 1: Management and organization
- Axis 2: People
- Axis 3: Assessment
- Axis 4: Cooperation
- Axis 5: Communication
- Axis 6: Students

Every year an annual Management plan and budget are published based on the Strategic Plan.

The strategic plan includes clear practical objectives, rather than giving a clear idea of where the Agency wants to head to in the medium term, and its development views. A more explicit link between the mission and vision statement and the strategic plan would be useful in the opinion of the panel.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should make its medium term ambitions and the direction it wants to head to more explicit in a formal statement.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.5, and thus fully complies with ENQA Criterion 4.

4.5 ENQA criterion 5 / ESG 3.6: Independence

STANDARD:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

GUIDELINES:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Findings of the panel

In 2010, as a prior step to the elaboration of the self-evaluation report for application for ENQA membership, a self-evaluation review was conducted in order to identify the changes that should be made in the organization and functioning of Unibasq with the overall aim of meeting the ESG. It was considered necessary to adapt the regulation of the Agency, enabling independence and allowing it to have full responsibility for its performance. As a consequence, Act 13/2012 regulating the existence and operation of Unibasq was approved. Both the Act and the new Statutes ensure the independence of the Agency as is shown in several selected paragraphs from the Act:

- In the introduction: "(...) it must also clearly and independently define its mission and have sufficient human and physical resources to fulfil it. It must work independently from governmental and university authorities and in accordance with objective, public and internationally comparable procedures and standards".
- In article 1: "...it is a legal person of its own, with full capacity to act and full control over its own capital resources for the purpose of performing its functions in accordance with this Act."
- In article 4.2: "The Agency must act fully independently and objectively in the performance of its evaluation accreditation and certification activities."
- In article 4.4: "The evaluation committees must act fully independently and the result of their assessments cannot be changed by any other body of the Agency."
- In article 6.6: "Members of the Agency's bodies act in their own name in full independence of judgement, and not as representatives of any constituency to which they may belong."

Independence is ensured by the procedures to develop the evaluation, accreditation and certification processes, including the selection of experts. This is also a core point in the Agency Statutes, which refer to independence as a basic value. Independence is also underlined in Article 8 of Unibasq's Code of Ethics.

The independence of Unibasq's operations is based upon the operational independence of its Technical Bodies (the Advisory Board and the Evaluation Committees). The definition of procedures and methods for the evaluation schemes, and the appointment of external experts is the responsibility of the Director, upon the recommendation of the Advisory Board whose members are mainly from outside of the Basque University System. Being a member of the scientific-technical bodies of the agency is incompatible with the holding of a single-person managerial position at any institution that may be potentially

evaluated. The outcome of each individual evaluation is the responsibility of the Evaluation Committee. This separation of responsibilities ensures the independence of decision making concerning evaluation, accreditation and certification. The selection of experts and evaluation committees is conducted in every scheme according to public requirements and clear criteria set out in the Unibasq Statutes, following the protocol for the selection of Unibasq experts, published on the website. The Advisory Board is in charge of the evaluation of adequate candidates for each evaluation committee. Once the selection is made, the Advisory Board proposes the list of candidates to the Director for the corresponding appointment. Every expert has to sign a code of ethics acceptance document and declaration of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interests. In all evaluation schemes the decision of the Evaluation Committee is binding, and is transmitted to the Agency's Director for communication.

Based on its meetings with the different stakeholders, the panel has noted that the Agency has both strong links with the Government and the Higher Education Institutions in the Basque Country. The Government is represented in the Governing Board. It is funding nearly all operations and decides on a multi-annual contract which is to regulate the links of functions and resources between the Government of the Autonomous Community and the Agency. Although Unibasq is responsible for defining its protocols, the protocols need to be published in the Official Journal of the Basque Country in order to get legal value.

The three Basque universities are represented in the Governing Board and interactions between staff and HE institutions seem to be frequent. Nevertheless, the panel is convinced that the mentioned safeguards in the law, the Statutes of the Agency and the procedures guarantee that Unibasq has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders. The composition of the Governing Board guarantees a balance between different stakeholders. The Advisory Board consists of independent national and international experts and is the body which is responsible for defining the procedures. The staff takes care in communication and insists on formal written communication in case of questions or complaints. Finally, the provision that no decision can be changed by another body of the Agency has been mentioned several times as to be very instrumental to guarantee independence in decision making.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.6, and thus fully complies with ENQA Criterion 5.

4.6 ENQA Criterion 6 / ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

STANDARD:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

GUIDELINES:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Findings of the panel

The processes, criteria and procedures used by Unibasq are always defined by the Agency and published on the website prior to each evaluation. For the establishment of the criteria and procedures of evaluation, Unibasq takes into consideration the Unibasq legal framework as well as the mandatory Spanish and Basque Country regulations. The procedures are always elaborated by Agency staff (draft documents) and then approved or modified by the Advisory Board. For an adequate dissemination of the programme documentation, the Agency not only publishes their content on the website, but also organises training and informative meetings with the universities and the applicants.

Although Unibasq includes self-evaluation in several procedures, the panel is of the opinion that self-evaluation reports are often rather descriptive. The panel suggests that programmes and institutions be more stimulated to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports, although the panel recognises that Unibasq promotes a self-critical approach. The peer review panel also welcomes the initiatives taken to facilitate the self-evaluation process within the re-accreditation procedures which will be implemented soon. Indeed, a critical self-evaluation process adds value to the whole external quality assurance process, as a common understanding of strengths and weaknesses within an organization is a good basis for quality improvement.

As indicated before, the panel believes site visits play an important role in external quality assurance. Unibasq organises site visits in the certification phase of AUDIT and DOCENTIA and will soon do so in the re-accreditation process of study programmes. Nevertheless, the panel suggests to reconsider whether site visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures Unibasq implements.

The peer review panel has discussed the procedures for programmes and institutions to comment on draft reports. In the case of study programmes and higher institution evaluations, the Evaluation Committee issues a preliminary report which is communicated to the interested party. Then a period for the submission of observations and comments is opened about what is established in the report. Finally the report is reviewed taking into account the relevant considered observations, and the final report is issued. Nevertheless, the review panel suggests to make this procedure more transparent and formalized, in order to ensure a full understanding of the interaction between the evaluation committee and the HEI and to make sure that there is no ambiguity about the ambition of the applied standards.

Appeal procedures are only established for evaluation schemes which evaluate individual performance. Unibasq is aware that it should create clearer appeal procedures for the other evaluation schemes.

As discussed under ESG 2.5 Reporting, the reports written by Unibasq are well appreciated by the Basque Government and the involved Higher Education Institutions. Nevertheless, in most of the reports the panel reviewed a clear justification of the conclusions is lacking. Reports are published for Follow-up procedures of study programmes, AUDIT and DOCENTIA.

As discussed under ESG 2.6 Follow-up, the review panel finds the follow-up procedures which Unibasq applies satisfactory.

Unibasq doesn't have a formal appeals procedure yet, except for evaluation schemes which evaluate individual performance. It is at present considering the creation of an appeals commission.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should stimulate programmes and institutions more to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports.
- Unibasq should reconsider whether site visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures.
- Unibasq should clarify the procedures for comments on the preliminary reports and establish formal appeal procedures.
- Unibasq should integrate the key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly in its reports.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ESG 3.7, and thus substantially complies with ENQA Criterion 6.

4.7 ENQA Criterion 7 / ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures

STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

GUIDELINES:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
 - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
 - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
 - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are sub-contracted to other parties;
 - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

Findings of the panel

Unibasq has implemented several processes to ensure the quality of its internal activities. The underlying philosophy of these processes is expressed in the Unibasq Internal Quality Policy, which is published on its website. Besides, Unibasq's Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) is defined in a Quality Handbook and Procedures document, which is based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) continuous improvement cycle.

The agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance. Based on the meetings the review panel had with the different stakeholders, it is clear that Unibasq operates in line with its ambition to contribute to the quality of higher education in the Basque Country and is considered an important actor to this aim.

Experts are selected according to Unibasq's Protocol for the selection of experts. Unibasq has also developed a code of ethics, which includes provisions on potential conflicts of interest. All experts are requested to sign a declaration of "acceptance of the code of ethics and declaration of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interests" with a commitment to indicating any conflict of interest which could occur while developing the task assigned by the Agency.

The experts are hired by the Agency, thus Unibasq does not subcontract evaluation processes. Unibasq is fully subject to the current legislation applicable to public administration in Spain and the Basque Country. Specifically, with regard to subcontracting, the Agency must comply with the law governing public sector contracts. Therefore, Unibasq has in place a procedure to select providers and to monitor their performance. The Suppliers Procedure is an internal document which is used by the staff of Unibasq.

As previously mentioned, Unibasq has in place an IQAS based on the PDCA cycle. This IQAS contains a continuous improvement process which includes internal feedback

mechanisms, internal reflection mechanisms and external feedback mechanisms in order to gather information about the Agency's performance and opportunities for improvement. Staff performance is assessed on an annual basis in order to apply continuous improvement criteria to the work of each individual member of staff. Technical staff formally assesses the performance of each expert. Experts are asked to assess the evaluation process. A formalized process for monitoring participant satisfaction has been implemented during 2013. Unibasq also holds informal meetings with the higher education institutions to receive feedback. The Students Consultative Board which has been established recently will allow to involve students more actively in the work of Unibasq. The panel appreciates the feedback mechanisms Unibasq has in place, but suggests (as indicated under ESG 2.2) to focus more on a broader stakeholder involvement in the development phase of evaluation schemes. The stakeholder involvement in this phase is limited to the members of the Advisory Board.

Unibasq is committed to undergoing an external review every five years. This is a formal legal requirement laid down in the Act governing the Agency (Article 5.5 "The agency must undergo every five years an external evaluation process involving the participation of international experts"). It is expected that this regular external evaluation will eventually be carried out in accordance with ENQA standards, once Unibasq becomes a member of ENQA.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq fully complies with ESG 3.8, and thus fully complies with ENQA Criterion 7.

4.8 ENQA criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims

STANDARD

- i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups.
- ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
- iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Based on its discussions with different stakeholders and the documentation provided, the panel is convinced that Unibasq pays careful attention to quality improvement and the development of a quality culture in the Basque university system. Unibasq ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner. The Evaluation Committees play an important role in guaranteeing consistent judgments.

As mentioned under ESG 3.7, the peer review panel has discussed the procedures for programmes and institutions to appeal. Appeal procedures are only established for evaluation schemes which evaluate individual performance. Unibasq is aware that it should create clearer appeal procedures for the other evaluation schemes. The panel supports the idea to create a commission which would deal with appeals.

As mentioned before, the panel has noticed the strong support from all stakeholders for Unibasq to become a Full Member of ENQA, as an important step to ensure its full involvement in the European Higher Education Area. Indeed, Spanish legislation states full membership of ENQA as a necessary condition to take full responsibility for some evaluation schemes, such as the re-accreditation of university programmes. Furthermore, Unibasq has the ambition to become more active at the European level. At the moment of the site visit financial resources and staff time for this are limited. Unibasq hopes to get more resources to be active at a European level within the new multi-annual contract with the Basque Government.

Recommendations

- Unibasq should establish formal appeal procedures.
- Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that Unibasq substantially complies with ENQA Criterion 8.

5 Conclusion and development

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Review Panel is of the opinion that, although in the performance of its functions, Unibasq is not fully compliant with the *ENQA Membership Provisions*, the Agency is, nonetheless sufficiently compliant to justify full/ membership of ENQA.

The criteria where full compliance have not been achieved are 1, 3, 6 and 8 and the agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these criteria at the earliest opportunity.

6 Recommendations

For the benefit of Unibasq, the peer review panel made the following recommendations to further improve the work of Unibasq:

- Unibasq should re-evaluate whether the assessment of students could be evaluated more systematically within the different evaluation schemes.
- Unibasq should focus its mandatory evaluation schemes more on the compliance of the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions with Part I of the ESG.
- Unibasq should consider how stakeholders involvement could be further increased in the development of procedures, next to their representation in the Advisory Board.
- Unibasq should reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation schemes.
- Unibasq should continue to monitor that the self-evaluation reports are of a self-critical nature.
- Unibasq should initiate a review of the DOCENTIA procedures in order to reduce the administrative burden of this evaluation scheme in cooperation with other Spanish agencies.
- Unibasq should integrate the key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly in its reports.
- Unibasq should consider to broaden the intended readership of its reports.
- Unibasq should use the general findings of its external quality assurance processes more as a basis for system-wide analyses on the Basque University System.
- Unibasq should try to diversify its income in order to become less dependent from the Basque Government funding.
- Unibasq should make its medium term ambitions and the direction it wants to head to more explicit.
- Unibasq should stimulate programmes and institutions more to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports.
- Unibasq should reconsider whether site visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures.
- Unibasq should clarify the procedures for comments on the preliminary reports and establish formal appeal procedures.
- Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.

7 Annexes

7.1. Annex - Site visit schedule

Wednesday February 12th 2014

16:00 – 19:00 Private meeting of the review panel

19:00 – 19:45 Meeting with the Management of the Agency

- Juan Andres Legarreta – Director of Unibasq
- José Manuel Valle – Deputy director of Unibasq
- Eva Fernández de Labastida – Evaluation responsable of Unibasq

Thursday February 13th 2014

9:00 – 9:30 Meeting with the Basque Government

- Itziar Alcorta – Universities and Research Vice Minister of Basque Government
- Francisco J. Alonso – University General Director of Basque Government

9:30 – 9:40 Break

9:40 – 10:30 Meeting with the Governing Board

- M^a Paz Espinosa – Secretary of the Governing Board
- Óscar Altuzarra - Member of the Unibasq Governing Board
- Aratz Castro – Student, Member of the Unibasq Governing Board
- Guy Haug - Member of the Unibasq Governing Board
- Juan Andres Legarreta – Director of Unibasq Governing Board

10:40 – 11:30 Meeting with the Advisory Board

- Jörn Grunewald - Member of the Advisory Board
- Perla Cohen – Member of the Advisory Board
- Paz Francés – Student, Member of Advisory Board
- Néstor Torres - Member of the Advisory Board

11:30 – 11:50 Coffee Break

11:50 – 12:30 Meeting with the Basque Universities Presidents

- D. Iosu Zabala - Rector of Mondragon University
- D. Iñaki Goirizelaia - Rector of UPV/EHU University
- D. José María Guibert - Rector of Deusto University

13:30 – 14:20 Meeting with the Universities' Technical Quality Units

- Jon Altuna (Mondragon University)
- Miren Murgiondo (Mondragon University)
- Nekane Balluerka (UPV/EHU)
- Amaya Zarraga (UPV)
- Maria Jesús Pando And. (Deusto)
- Begoña Arrieta (Deusto University)

14:20 – 14:30 Break

14:30 – 15:20 Meeting with the Study Programmes Evaluation Committee

- Julio Abalde – President of Programmes Evaluation Committee

- Luis Basañez – Member of Programmes Evaluation Committee
- Bruno Camus – Member of Programmes Evaluation Committee
- Inmaculada Ortiz – Member of Programmes Evaluation Committee
- Unai Martínez – Student, Member of Programmes Evaluation Committee

15:30 – 16:20 Meeting with AUDIT (Institutional Evaluation) Committee

- Javier Monforte – Member of AUDIT committee
- Emilio Diez de Castro – President of AUDIT committee
- José Luis Casillas – Member of AUDIT committee
- Carmen Navarro – Member of AUDIT committee

16:20 – 17:00 Coffee break and internal panel discussion

17:00 – 18:00 Meeting with Unibasq Staff

- Eva Fernández de Labastida
- Idoia Collado
- Naiara Martínez
- Tamara Cantrabrana (Ethics Committee)
- Miriam Martínez (Quality Committee)

20:00 Dinner

Friday February 14th 2014

9:00 – 10:00 Meeting with some other Evaluation Committees (Academic staff accreditation - and Research activities)

- Iciar Astiasaran – Member of Medical and Health Sciences committee for Academic staff accreditation
- Manuel Vijande – President of Medical and Health Sciences committee for Academic staff accreditation
- Manuel de León – President of Experimental Sciences committee for Academic staff accreditation committee
- Enrique Amezua Ochoa – Member of Research activities committee
- Begoña Ochoa – Member of Research activities committee

10:00 – 12:45 Internal review panel discussion

12:45 – 13:15 Final meeting with the Management of the agency

- Juan Andres Legarreta – Director of Unibasq
- José Manuel Valle – Deputy director of Unibasq
- Eva Fernández de Labastida – Evaluation responsible of Unibasq

13:15 – 15:00 Final discussion of review panel to agree outcomes and to discuss main lines of the report with lunch

15:00 – 15:15 Presentation of the conclusions of the panel to the Board and staff

7.2 Annex - Evidence

The panel received, next to the self-evaluation report all necessary evidence to come to conclusions about compliance with the ESG and ENQA membership criteria

On beforehand the peer review panel received the following documents:

1. Act 13/2012 of 28th June 2012 governing Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (web-en)
2. Act 3/2004, of 25th February 2004, on the Basque University System (web)

3. Agreements with institutions
4. Analytical accounting reports
5. Annual activities report (web)
6. Annual Audits (web)
7. Annual management plan (web)
8. Basque Autonomous Community's general budget (web)
9. Code of Ethics (web-en)
10. Decree 204/2013, 16th April, approving the Statutes of Unibasq- Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (web)
11. Documentation about the AUDIT Conference (web)
12. Documentation about the DOCENTIA Conference (web)
13. Documentation on academic staff evaluation schemes (Guides, templates and additional information on the scheme) (web)
14. Documentation on higher education institution evaluation Schemes AUDIT and DOCENTIA (Guides, templates and additional information on the scheme) (web)
15. Documentation on follow-up of study programme evaluation schemes (Guides, templates and additional information on the scheme) (web)
16. Evaluation reports (web)
17. Headquarters map
18. Information about the Unibasq Symposiums (web)
19. Internal Quality Policy (web-en)
20. Internal records about cooperation with the SIIU design
21. Law 30/2007, of 30th October, governing public sector contracts
22. List of Services (web-en)
23. Lists of Evaluation Committees (web)
24. Minutes of meetings of Evaluation Committees
25. Minutes of meetings of the Advisory Board
26. Minutes of meetings of the Governing Board
27. Minutes of meetings with Higher Education Institutions
28. Minutes of meetings with the chairpersons of committees
29. Monthly budget's monitoring reports
30. Organizational chart (web-en)
31. Process map (web-en)
32. Protocol for selecting Unibasq experts and Annex I. Requirements for selecting Unibasq expert staff (web-en)
33. Report on the status of external quality assessment in Spanish universities (ICU) (web)
34. Royal Decree 1393/2007 of 29th of October, which establishes the organization of official university teaching (web)
35. Royal Decree 861/2010 of 2nd of July, which amends Royal Decree 1393/2007 of 29th of October, which establishes the organization of official university teaching (web)
36. Royal Decree 99/2011 of 28th of January, which regulates official doctoral studies (web)
37. Strategic plan (web-en)

During the site visit the peer review panel receives additional documents, e.g. an overview table of all evaluation schemes applied by Unibasq, recent financial accounts and budgets, additional review reports and documents related to the review process, data about students and staff in the Basque University System and information of the workload of the Unibasq staff.