



Unibasq Follow-up report

September 2016

Unibasq – The Agency for Quality of the Basque University System underwent its first review by ENQA in 2014, resulting in full membership of ENQA granted for five years while stating that the Board would like to receive a follow-up report on the recommendations of the panel report within two years of its decision (September 2016).

As a result, an action plan was developed and approved by Unibasq Advisory Board (March 2015) and work started immediately in order to adapt Unibasq activities to the recommendations of the panel report. The main outcome of this plan is the new [Unibasq Strategic Plan 2016-2019](#), and the recently approved [multi-annual programme contract](#)¹ for the same period which is in line with the strategic plan.

The external review report has been taken as an improvement tool for further enhancement of Unibasq activities, although there is an important issue that should be raised and that is the moment when the first review was made. At that moment, many changes were being implemented and new evaluation schemes were about to start as a result of the adaptation of the Spanish University System to the EHEA. As a result, most of the areas for development are covered by the new evaluation schemes that began soon after the external review was made. Nevertheless, we will continue improving all our areas of activity taking into account the recommendations made.

In order to gather our stakeholders' opinions, this follow-up report has been reviewed by our Advisory Board in its 28/06/2016 meeting and our Governing Board in its 13/07/2016 meeting.

¹ Article 12.2 of the Act 13/2012 of 28 June 2012 governing Unibasq establishes “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, without prejudice to any other income it may have at its disposal, including from its own activities.”

Areas for development

- 1. Unibasq should re-evaluate whether the assessment of students could be evaluated more systematically within the different evaluation schemes.**

As stated above, since the external review, new evaluation schemes have started and so the assessment of students is evaluated systematically in our current evaluation schemes.

Regarding mandatory study programmes evaluation schemes, during the evaluation of study programmes for their authorisation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) stage, the study programme proposal should include a summary of the contents explaining the competences (learning outcomes) that should be achieved and their assessment (“Programme content”). Any change regarding this topic made to the original proposal has to be communicated to the Agency to approve it. Moreover, during the accreditation renewal (ex-post accreditation including a site-visit) the students learning outcomes are assessed including a review of the assessment methods (“Learning outcomes”).

In addition, apart from these two mandatory evaluation schemes, where specific criteria relate to the assessment of students, this student assessment has indeed been reviewed in several other schemes like AUDIT, DOCENTIA and the evaluation of certificates and diplomas (“títulos propios”), as was stated during the review. In all these schemes specific items related to how the students are assessed are in place. For instance:

- AUDIT Standard 1.2 “Development of study programmes that encourage student-centred learning” where there are specific items related to the learning assessment.
- DOCENTIA. The dimensions to assess teaching activity are:
 - Teaching planning
 - Teaching performance
 - Outcomes (results achieved by students)

In the first two the criteria and methods of student assessment are reviewed.

- Evaluation of certificates and diplomas: under the “Learning programme” standard a main point that must be reviewed is whether there is an adequate assessment system of the achievement of student competences.

2. 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.

The external quality assurance procedures used by Unibasq take into account the effectiveness of HEI's internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Unibasq's evaluation and analysis functions are planned and performed in order to help HEIs meet the internal quality assurance criteria. If the institutions can improve their internal control processes, this will enhance the whole Basque University System.

Regarding study programmes mandatory evaluation schemes, during the evaluation of study programmes for their authorisation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) stage, the report submitted by the university must include the following:

- The name and description of the degree.
- The justification for the degree.
- The competences.
- Student access and admission.
- The programme content.
- The academic staff.
- The physical resources and services.
- The intended outcomes.
- The internal QA system.
- The timetable for implementation.
- The economic report, including incomes, expenses and investments related with the degree.

In the follow-up process, emphasis is put on both the public information and the analysis of the indicator values. The universities have to analyze the development of the study programme, and, if necessary, make proposals for corrective or improvement actions. Besides, they have to review the implementation of their IQAS and, if necessary, reflect on the recommendations given in previous review reports.

In the accreditation renewal process, the self-report submitted by the university must include:

- Organization and development of activities
- Information and transparency
- Internal Quality Assurance System

- Academic staff
- Infrastructure and services
- Learning outcomes
- Performance and satisfaction indicators

In addition, the rest of Unibasq evaluation schemes are in line with Part I of the ESG (2015) as can be seen in the following table:

ESG Part 1	STUDY PROGRAMMES EVALUATION				INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION		ACADEMIC STAFF EVALUATION		
	EX-ANTE ACCREDITATION	FOLLOW-UP	ACCREDITATION RENEWAL	CERTIFICATES AND DIPLOMAS	DOCENTIA	AUDIT	ACCREDITATION	PERFORMANCE EVALUATION	RESEARCH ACTIVITY EVALUATION
1. Policy for quality assurance	*	*	*	*	*	*			
2. Design and approval of programmes	*	*	*	*		*			
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	*	*	*	*		*			
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	*	*	*	*		*			
5. Teaching staff	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
6. Learning resources and student support	*	*	*	*		*			
7. Information management	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
8. Public information	*	*	*	*	*	*			
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	*	*	*	*		*			
10. Cyclical external quality assurance	*	*	*	*	*	*			

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

As a result of this recommendation, we are analysing some other ways of involving stakeholders, in particular professionals, as a further way of improvement. There is an agreement signed with Euskalit, the Basque Foundation for Excellence, which has hundreds of associates with experience in quality management in all knowledge areas and some of them have already taken part in some of our reviews or our evaluation committees and we are thinking of meeting with different employers’ organizations to gather their views. In order to further increase the stakeholders’ involvement, we will seek new ways of collaboration with our Students Consultative Board for the involvement of students and alumni. Since 2015, Unibasq has organized several trainings with students regarding study programmes follow-up and accreditation renewal. These trainings enhance students’ participation in Unibasq’s activities and

evaluation procedures, help improving the study programmes as they promote the participation of students in their universities' IQAS and broaden the diffusion of quality assurance activities to the students' families and society.

Currently, in every study programme or institutional evaluation procedure, previous to its approval by Unibasq Advisory Board, the documentation is sent to the universities and our evaluation committees in order to gather their contributions and opinions. During the development of the accreditation renewal procedure, a working group with staff representation from the three universities was created in order to propose to Unibasq a list of the most appropriate indicators and evidences needed for the accreditation renewal of the study programmes. In addition, during the interviews with different stakeholders (academic staff, support staff, students, alumni, employers...) for the study programmes accreditation renewal, we have gathered information regarding the evaluation procedure.

Once an evaluation procedure ends, we collect information regarding the evaluation procedure and improvement recommendations from our experts, university academic staff, and everyone involved through different surveys. In 2016 we have visited our three universities to present the outcomes of the accreditation renewal, highlighting their strengths and improvement areas and have presented the new follow-up procedure.

As can be seen in Unibasq's organizational structure (<http://www.unibasq.org/en/que-es-unibasq/estructura-organizativa/comision-asesora>) the Advisory Board includes academics from the three universities of the Basque Country; although they do not "represent" the institutions, but act in their own name, they can consider the institutions' point of view in the procedures they have to approve. The involvement of students in the development of evaluation procedures has been further improved through the Students Consultative Board created in 2015.

We consider that the present stakeholders' involvement is adequate while guaranteeing Unibasq's operational independence.

- 4. Unibasq should reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation schemes. + 13. Unibasq should reconsider whether the site-visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures.**

The answer given below can apply to these two recommendations.

The full review model has been used and is used in some stages of the study programmes evaluation schemes (VSMA framework – ex-ante accreditation (validation)-follow-up-modification-accreditation renewal) and in the institutional evaluation schemes (AUDIT and DOCENTIA). The review is taken in these

evaluation procedures as a cycle where the full review model is applied during different stages, including a self- evaluation, site visit, draft report, final report, and follow-up of the recommendations.

- 5. Unibasq should continue to monitor that the self-evaluation reports are of a self-critical nature.**
+ 12. Unibasq should stimulate programmes and institutions more to analyses their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports.

The answer given below can apply to these two recommendations.

As stated in the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract, one of the main objectives is to simplify our evaluation procedures, making the documentation that is generated more useful and efficient. When an evaluation procedure is reviewed, we are including visible spaces to highlight strengths and weaknesses so the institution can reflect about them.

Unibasq has already fostered a self-critical approach for the follow-up and accreditation renewal evaluation schemes, as can be seen in a sample of our universities' study programmes self-evaluation reports for the follow-up and the accreditation renewal:

- Bachelor in Biology (Faculty of Science and Technology, UPV/EHU)
 - Follow-up self-evaluation report:

<https://gestion-servicios.ehu.es/plantillas/Biolog%EDa%20Autoinforme%2014-15.pdf>

- Accreditation renewal self-evaluation report:

<https://gestion-servicios.ehu.es/plantillas/81.%20Biologia%20Autoinforme.pdf>

In addition, in the AUDIT and DOCENTIA evaluation schemes, the universities have to develop their improvement action plans which can be found, for example, in their annual management reports:

- Annual management report (2014/2015) Faculty of Science and Technology (UPV/EHU)

http://www.ehu.eus/documents/19559/1438229/InfGestion2014-15_es_UNIKUDE.pdf

- 6. 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.**

As aforementioned, one of the main objectives of the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract is to simplify our evaluation procedures. In fact, Unibasq's and the rest of the Spanish agencies' main aim has always been and will continue to be to help universities simplify and improve their own procedures. Moreover and regarding the DOCENTIA evaluation scheme, there is a specific objective in the strategic plan regarding the promotion of this evaluation procedure. By the end of the 2016-2019 period, there is an aim that 50% of the Basque University System academic staff is accredited within DOCENTIA. So we will continue supporting the three universities in the developing of this scheme.

In the Unibasq 2013 self-evaluation report it was already stated that "In the DOCENTIA scheme, after a positive evaluation of the Evaluation Procedure of the University Teaching staff, the institution implements it. Unibasq has been monitoring the implementation of DOCENTIA for at least two years and, only in the third year of implementation can the Certificate for the Procedure be issued, if the conditions are met." This means that there are several stages in the evaluation scheme. The first one is to support the universities in designing their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their teaching staff. The second one is to assess if the designed procedure comply with the criteria of the DOCENTIA evaluation scheme. Once the positive evaluation of these two preliminary steps is achieved, the university has to actually implement the procedure on an experimental basis ("pilot experience") for at least two years in order to check the fitness for purpose of their own procedures; only after this stage is completed, can the procedure be certified, if it meets certain criteria. During the follow-up, the agencies give advice to the universities telling them if their evaluation procedures are feasible and achievable, but understanding that it is the universities' responsibility to develop the evaluation procedure, respecting their autonomy.

7. Unibasq should integrate the key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly in its reports.

Although there might be still further work to do, Unibasq reports gather the compliance with the criteria, recommendations and, if so, good practices. This can be seen in the published reports for the accreditation renewal: <http://www.unibasq.org/en/programas/evaluacion-de-titulaciones/renovacion-acreditacion/resultados/>

As stated in the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract, one of the main objectives is to simplify our evaluation procedures, making the documentation it generates more useful and efficient. When an evaluation procedure is reviewed, we are including visible spaces to highlight the review key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly.

The justification of conclusions is clear to the HEIs, as the experts and the HEIs follow the same evaluation guides and criteria. All related information (legal framework, evaluation criteria and guidelines) is available on Unibasq's website. As stated, during the review, until now, the Agency has mainly focused the reporting on the suggestions for improvement, because we believe that this is the key to continuous improvement, which is the main purpose of our approach to evaluation.

Nevertheless, when the institutional accreditation procedure based on the new Royal Decree 420/2015, about the creation, recognition, authorisation and accreditation of universities and university centres, comes into force, the university centres that have certified the implementation of their IQAS, in line with the ESG, and 50% of their bachelor and master degrees are accredited, will have the chance of asking for institutional accreditation. For this institutional accreditation a report that will gather the findings of all the previous review reports of the centre and its degrees will be issued. With this kind of report we will have the chance of making all the conclusions more explicit.

8. Unibasq should consider to broaden the intended readership of its reports.

In order to further broaden our audience, and as a key objective of both the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract, Unibasq has started designing the Basque University System's Activity Observatory in order to publish information regarding the quality of the Basque University System. The main aim is to provide all the stakeholders (future students, families, employers, and the society as a whole) with comprehensive information about the quality of study programmes and institutions, making available the review reports at the same place. Furthermore, the students' trainings mentioned before can further improve the understanding of the evaluation reports.

Until now we have focused mainly on the universities and the university community as the intended readership of our reports. We realized that the society, as a whole, didn't know us and the work we do, so we made a video explaining Unibasq's activities (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlzj78Z1ang>). This is one step in order to make our activities and the results of our activities (review reports, activities reports...) known to a broad public. In addition, the symposia and similar events that Unibasq organizes, as our last summer course in collaboration with the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), help broadening the participation of different stakeholders like students and professionals (EUSKALIT members, teachers from secondary schools,...). Moreover, this kind of events is usually broadcasted enhancing the diffusion of Unibasq's activities and making the potential audience more aware of quality assurance in higher education.

When we thought how this recommendation could be implemented, we mainly discussed two main options within the Advisory Board: we might either contextualize the reports we published (by adding a brief summary of the evaluation context, standards and guidelines) or always include this information in our reports, even when the standard was fully complied with. In addition, and while nowadays the reports are published in a context where the related legislation, evaluation criteria and additional information can be reached, the evaluation reports for the accreditation renewal gather all of the above information.

9. 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.

As stated in the previous recommendation, one of the key objectives of both the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract is the development of the Basque University System's Activity Observatory in order to collect and publish information regarding the quality of the Basque University System. Once this observatory is developed Unibasq will have a unique tool for system-wide analyses on the Basque University System.

As stated during the review, we have continued making an [annual report on Unibasq activities](#), and in collaboration with ANECA and the other Spanish quality assurance agencies, a [report on the status of external quality assessment of Spanish universities](#). This report presents the main outcomes of the activities of the higher education quality assurance agencies, both with respect to the evaluation of study programmes and institutions and of teaching and research staff. All these reports are published on the Agency's website, so that all stakeholders involved can have access at any time to the relevant information about the Basque University System.

10. Unibasq should try to diversify its income in order to become less dependent from the Basque Government funding. + 15. Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.

The answer given below can apply to these two recommendations.

The new model of financing has eventually come into operation in 2016. 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 approved the multi-annual programme contract according to new Strategic Plan 2016-2019. It is important to note that the multi-annual programme contract should be regarded as a way of improving quality in all the Agency's activity areas, leading to the progressive development of actions to achieve the objectives contained in the Strategic plan while ensuring at the same time the Agency's funding autonomy.

The aforementioned multi-annual programme contract in line with the new Strategic plan establishes specific actions related to playing an active role within ENQA, and extends it to a broad international level through joint activities with foreign universities and institutions and participating actively in seminars and international meetings. Regarding the playing of an active role within ENQA, one of the members of our staff is attending the 11th training of reviewers taking place on 22-23 September 2016 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

In addition to the economic funds, human resources have been increased, and since the end of 2015 the staff was strengthened with the inclusion of technical staff. In this line, two more evaluation technicians have joined Unibasq. Furthermore, in order to build a quality core of personnel in the agency, an assessment of job positions is going to be made to facilitate the alignment of the staff with the new reality of Unibasq.

Besides Basque Government funding, the agency also receives income from fees coming out of certain evaluation schemes, and more specifically on the ones related with academic staff evaluation, where fees apply for every application made.

In the future, agreements with universities from other countries are expected to be achieved, which could gather additional resources for evaluation projects.

11. Unibasq should make its medium term ambitions and the direction it wants to head to more explicit.

The Governing Council approved the Strategic Plan of Unibasq (2016-2019) at the end of 2015. It includes 4 strategic axes in which the agency will focus its mission to develop in the next four years:

- Axe 1: Services: Consultancy and Assessment
- Axe 2: Social Influence: Communication, Collaboration with Institutions, Quality Agencies and Social Agents
- Axe 3: Agency's Internationalization Backing the Basque University System
- Axe 4: Internal Organization, Management, Planning and Human Resources

In this link to the [Unibasq Strategic Plan 2016-2019](#), the objectives and the related activities and indicators can be found. Moreover, as explained before, the Unibasq Governing Board approved the multi-annual programme contract according to new Strategic Plan 2016-2019. The special feature of this new model of financing is that it lays down the principle that funding is linked to the fulfilment of certain objectives. This way, Unibasq's medium term ambitions are made explicit and can be monitored with objective related indicators.

12. Unibasq should stimulate programmes and institutions more to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports.

See recommendation number 5.

13. Unibasq should reconsider whether the site-visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures.

See recommendation number 4.

14. Unibasq should clarify the procedures for comments on the preliminary reports and establish formal appeal procedures.

In order to further improve its appeals procedure, Unibasq has analysed the possibility of creating a commission to deal with appeals. Eventually, the decision has been taken that the current Ethics Committee becomes the Ethics and Rights Committee, which will be responsible for supervising the correct implementation of Unibasq's evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures and the correct application of its Ethics code. In addition, this Committee could declare evaluations null and the evaluations will have to be made again, although this Committee does not have reassessment capacity. The reasons why evaluations could be declared null are if the Committee sees risk of impartiality of some expert or if during the procedure some defense right is broken.

In the case of study programmes and institutional evaluations, Unibasq does not issue a formal resolution. The Evaluation Committee issues a preliminary report which is communicated to the interested party. Then a period for the submission of claims is opened. Finally the report is reviewed taking into account the submitted claims, and a final report is issued. Unibasq does not make the formal decision, which is a competence of the University Council. If there is a negative decision, there is an appeal procedure where the University Council can ask Unibasq to review it. In this case, the presidents of Unibasq Study programmes evaluation committees will issue a report. If the final outcome is still negative, the institutions have the option to appeal before the Courts in accordance with Act 29/1998 on Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction.

In the case of academic staff evaluation, where a formal resolution is issued, the appeals procedure follows the state regulation established for administrative procedures (30/1992 Act on Administrative Procedure). In addition, there is an option to appeal before the Courts in accordance with Act 29/1998 on Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction.

15. Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.

See recommendation number 10.