

# CNA

Ministry of National Education  
Republic of Colombia

## GUIDE 01

### HIGH QUALITY ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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# INTRODUCTION

Through Decree 843/June 13, 2020, the National Government amended Decree 1075/2015, the Single Regulatory Decree of the Education Sector, in order to regulate Articles 53 and 54 of Law 30/1992 [1]<sup>1</sup> to establish the parties of the National Accreditation System (SNA, for the Spanish original); to define accreditation as the temporary recognition of high quality granted by the Ministry of National Education to academic programs and institutions that provide the public service of higher education that meet the highest quality criteria and achieve their purposes and objectives; and clarify the stages for the accreditation procedure, both of academic programs and institutions, providing in that sense, (i) the initial conditions assessment, (ii) self-assessment, (iii) external assessment by academic peers, (iv) comprehensive assessment and (v) the issuance of the administrative act granting accreditation or the formulation of recommendations for the institution.

Upon National Accreditation Council (CNA) recommendation, the aforementioned regulation authorized the National Council of Higher Education (CESU) to define the accreditation model, which should include, among other aspects, the principles, objectives, theoretical and conceptual foundations, quality criteria, accreditation deadlines, accreditation procedures, guidelines and guides.

Thus, the National Council of Higher Education (CESU), based on the proposal submitted by the National Accreditation Council through Agreement 02/2020, updated the High Quality Accreditation Model, based on the history and the high quality assessment processes that have been developed in the country; and on the progress achieved in terms of accreditation, which made it possible to address international trends; recognize the diversity and identity of the institutions; the different modalities and levels of academic programs; and the standardization of the model with the Higher Education Quality Assurance System.

This update takes into account aspects such as:

- a) Recognition of the high quality of national higher education institutions, in accordance with their legal nature, identity, mission, typology and regional context.
- b) Recognition of the high quality of the academic offerings, in correspondence with their level (professional technical, technological, university professionals), whether undergraduate (professional technical, technological, university professionals), or postgraduate (master's, doctoral and medical-surgical specialties); and with their modality of study (classroom, dual, distance, virtual or others that combine and integrate these modalities).
- c) The incorporation of outcomes and achievement indicators to the processes of self-assessment and external assessment of academic programs and institutions, in addition to the indicators of capabilities and processes addressing the guidelines of the previous model.
- d) The incorporation of learning outcomes assessment in the processes of undergraduate and postgraduate academic programs.
- e) The unification of the guidelines for accreditation of academic programs, which are complemented with aspects to be assessed for each of the levels and modalities of training, which are built and updated with the academic and scientific communities.
- f) A clear distinction between the assessment for accreditation purposes of academic institutions and programs, including factors and characteristics that are appropriate for each case.

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[1] Initially, Decree 2904/1994 regulated articles 53 and 54 of Law 30/1992.

- g) The targeting of institutional multi-campus accreditation, allowing its performance as a whole or gradually by places of development.

This update would not be complete if the terms of the stages and activities of the high quality accreditation procedure of academic programs and institutions are not determined, and parameters set forth in Agreement 02/2020 are developed, for which Law 1437/2011, the Code of Administrative Procedure and Administrative Disputes, the anti-bureaucracy laws in force and other applicable regulations must be taken as a reference. This will enable the institutions, the National Accreditation Council, the academic peers and the Ministry of National Education to be aware of the duration of each of the activities involved in the accreditation procedure, which contributes to legal certainty and allows the different actors to plan the different activities to be carried out as part of this procedure, taking as a reference that according to the provisions of Article 38 of Agreement 02/2020, the high quality accreditation procedure must be completed within a term of ten (10) months, as of the date of submission of the self-assessment report.

Since this document is a guide for the procedure, it was defended before the Administrative Department of Public Service (DAFP, for the Spanish original) in order to be included in the Single System of Information on Procedures (SUIT, for the Spanish original).

The National Accreditation Council is confident that this guide and its application will make the accreditation procedure more accessible to the institutions and, therefore, that they will be able to successfully complete each of the stages involved.

Finally, and in accordance with the provisions of Agreement 02/2020, the CESU authorized the issuance of this guide during its meeting held on December 15, 2020.

## PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This Guide describes the procedure for the high quality accreditation of academic programs and institutions, in which each of the activities and the terms for their completion are specified. The procedure may culminate with the issuance of the administrative act granting accreditation or the communication of the recommendations for the program or institution within a framework of confidentiality.

# **STAGES OF THE HIGH QUALITY ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE**



# 1. INITIAL CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT STAGE

The institution's Registered Agent shall submit the application through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA, for the Spanish original) or its equivalent, stating the institution's intention to initiate the high quality accreditation procedure, either for one or more of its academic programs or for the institution, attaching information that demonstrates compliance with the requirements set forth in Articles 24 and 25 of Agreement 02/2020 issued by the CESU.

Institutions that currently have high quality institutional accreditation do not have to go through the initial conditions assessment stage in order to advance in the high quality accreditation procedure, for the first time, of undergraduate academic programs.

## 1.1 Verification of the request to assess initial conditions

The National Accreditation Council will verify, within ten (10) business days following the submission of the request by the institution, that the information provided is complete and complies with the requirements set forth in Articles 24 and 25 of CESU Agreement 02/2020. If the request is incomplete, the National Accreditation Council will request complementary information within the same term.

The institution will have thirty (30) calendar days to comply with the request for information. Upon expiration of this term, if the institution has not complied with the request, it will be understood that the application has been withdrawn, unless it requests an extension for up to the same amount of time before the term has expired. This request can only be made once.

## 1.2 Visit to assess initial conditions

Once it is verified that the application for the initial conditions assessment is complete, and within the following fifteen (15) business days, the National Accreditation Council will appoint the council members who will conduct the visit for the initial conditions assessment. This visit shall be carried out prior agreement of the dates and agenda with the institution's Registered Agent, without exceeding the term of thirty (30) calendar days as of the date on which the council members responsible for conducting the visit are appointed.

For the initial conditions assessment of institutions and academic programs, the visit will be carried out at all the places of development presented by the institution in the application.

## 1.3 Submission of the report on the visit to assess initial conditions

The council members who carried out the initial conditions assessment visit shall prepare and submit the respective report within ten (10) business days following the date of the visit, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent.

## **1.4 Opinion on the initial conditions assessment**

The National Accreditation Council, in its meeting held during the month following or subsequent to the date of submission of the report on the visit to assess initial conditions, will issue an opinion indicating whether the institution or academic program meets the conditions to move forward in the self-assessment process for accreditation purposes. In any case, this opinion must be reported to the institution, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent, within five (5) calendar days following the date of issue.

If the initial conditions are not met, the opinion of the National Accreditation Council will describe the strengths and recommendations for improvement.

Since the opinion issued by the National Accreditation Council as a result of the Initial Conditions Assessment stage is a procedural act, the institution cannot file any appeals against it.

If the opinion indicates that the initial conditions are met, the institution may initiate the self-assessment for the purpose of the high quality accreditation of the institution or academic program, and will have one (1) year following the issuance of said opinion to submit the self-assessment report to the National Accreditation Council. If you do not meet this deadline, it will have to request the initial conditions assessment once again.

## 2. SELF-ASSESSMENT STAGE

### 2.1 Definition of Self-Assessment

Self-assessment consists of the permanent exercise of review, recognition, reflection and intervention carried out by the institution on itself or on an academic program, with broad participation of the academic community, and with the objective of assessing the performance of its substantive functions, in order to achieve high quality in all its processes, complying with the provisions of Agreement 02/2020 and the guidelines set forth in the guides established by the National Accreditation Council. The self-assessment process ends in a self-assessment report, which should discuss the results of the self-assessment and an improvement plan [2]<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 Submission of the Self-Assessment Report

In compliance with the provisions of Articles 32 to 34 of Agreement 02/2020, the institution must submit the self-assessment report and the required documents in pre-established forms, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent, in a term not exceeding one (1) year, following the issuance of the opinion by the National Accreditation Council regarding compliance with initial conditions.

It is important to reaffirm that, upon submission of the self-assessment report, the institution or academic program must continue to comply with the requirements set out and verified in the initial conditions assessment stage.

The National Accreditation Council shall verify that the self-assessment report is complete within ten (10) business days following its submission. If any additional information is required, the council shall request it from the institution, which shall have up to thirty (30) calendar days to provide the additional information, unless a one-time-only extension is requested for an equal term before the expiration of the initial term.

In any case, if the requested information is not provided once this term expires, it will be understood that the institution has abandoned the accreditation procedure.

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[2] Article 31 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

### 3. STAGE OF EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT BY ACADEMIC PEERS

It is the assessment performed by the academic peers, based on the self-assessment report and the visit carried out by the peers themselves, which leads to the preparation and submission of a report on the quality of the academic institution or program, taking into consideration the legal nature, identity, mission and type (in the case of accreditation of institutions) and the level of education and modality (in the case of accreditation of academic programs [3]<sup>3</sup>.

This stage consists of the following:

- a) Selection of the academic peers commission
- b) Preparation and scheduling of the visit
- c) Visit by the academic peers
- d) Report by the academic peers
- e) Submission of the peers' report to the institution

#### a) Selection of the academic peers commission

The peer commission will be created with the resumes from the peer database of the National Accreditation Council for this purpose. The peer database is made up of national and international academic experts, whose specific requirements have been established by the National Accreditation Council and approved by the National Council of Higher Education.

Within thirty (30) business days after verifying that the self-assessment report is complete, the National Accreditation Council will proceed to select the academic peer commission that will conduct the external assessment, whose number of members will be defined on a case-by-case basis. Within five (5) business days following the selection of the peer commission, the members of the peer commission will be informed of their selection, so that they may express their acceptance within the following five (5) business days. If all the academic peers accept, the National Accreditation Council will have five (5) business days to inform the institution, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent, about the academic peer commission selected.

Within five (5) business days following the communication stating the integration of the peer committee, the institution must accept it or request the National Accreditation Council, by means of a reasoned request, the replacement of one or more academic peers that make up the commission. The National Accreditation Council shall decide on the request within five (5) business days following its receipt and if grounds are found to accept the change, it shall proceed to appoint new academic peer(s) within the following fifteen (15) business days. The request to replace academic peers may be made one time only, as long as there are no grounds of disqualification, ineligibility, incompatibility or conflict of interest prompting further changes.

If the institution accepts the academic peer commission selected or does not express disagreement during the term provided to respond on the matter, the National Accreditation Council shall, within five (5) business days following the institution's response or the expiration of the term provided, formally appoint the academic peer commission to conduct the external assessment visit, from among which a coordinating peer shall be appointed.

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[3] Article 36 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

## **b) Preparation and scheduling of the visit**

Once the academic peer commission has been appointed, the National Accreditation Council shall deliver, within the following three (3) business days, the self-assessment report and its corresponding annexes to be studied, which provide the necessary input for structuring the agenda. At the same time and within fifteen (15) calendar days following the appointment of the academic peers, the Technical Secretariat of the National Accreditation Council shall contact the institution to agree on the date and agenda of the visit.

The external assessment visit shall take place within fifteen (15) calendar days from the time the date and final agenda are agreed upon.

Once the information provided by the institution or the academic program has been fully reviewed by the academic peer commission, and if additional information is needed to conduct the visit, the peer coordinator of the visit, within five (5) business days from the date of receipt of the information, shall inform the National Accreditation Council so that through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent, it may request said information from the institution within the following two (2) business days.

The institution shall have a term of fifteen (15) calendar days to submit, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA), or its equivalent, the required information.

## **c) Peer visit**

The technical secretariat of the National Accreditation Council shall arrange all the logistics required for the visit on the agreed date and agenda through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES - CNA) or its equivalent.

Once the visit is completed, the institution shall assess the academic peers in order to maintain a high-quality peer database. The National Accreditation Council shall provide the forms and the institution shall have up to three (3) business days following the visit to submit its assessment on the performance of the peers to the National Accreditation Council.

## **d) Report by the academic peers**

The academic peers shall prepare and submit the external assessment report through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA), or its equivalent, within a maximum period of twenty (20) calendar days following the visit. Within ten (10) business days following the submission of the external assessment report, the National Accreditation Council shall conduct a general analysis of the report to verify whether it complies with the established parameters. If the report does not comply with these parameters, it shall be returned to the academic peers for clarification, and they shall have a term of ten (10) calendar days to submit the final report.

## **e) Submission of the peers' report to the institution**

Once the National Accreditation Council accepts the report of the academic peers, the institution's Registered Agent shall be notified within five (5) business days after the National Accreditation Council has reviewed the latest version of said report, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent.

Within fifteen (15) business days following the receipt of the external assessment report, the institution's Registered Agent may provide the clarifications, explanations and complementary information deemed necessary, as well as the corresponding evidence. Such comments should be submitted through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent.

Once the aforementioned term has expired, and the Registered Agent has not commented on the external assessment report, the National Accreditation Council shall go on to the comprehensive assessment stage.

## 4. COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT STAGE

The comprehensive assessment of the high quality of an academic program or institution is carried out by the National Accreditation Council based on the results of the self-assessment, the external assessment report by the academic peers, the comments made by the institution regarding the report of the academic peers and other information that the council deems necessary to assess [4]<sup>4</sup>.

For purposes of the comprehensive assessment, the National Accreditation Council, in the meeting of the General Accreditation Chamber held during the month following or subsequent to the date of receipt of the comments submitted by the institution regarding the external assessment report, or the expiration of the term to submit them, shall issue an opinion, for which it shall previously appoint the council member(s) to serve as speaker(s).

The comprehensive assessment may end with the issuance of the opinion by the National Accreditation Council, through which it advises the Ministry of National Education to grant high quality accreditation of the institution or the academic program, as well as the term thereof. This opinion must be sent to the Ministry the day after the meeting of the General Accreditation Chamber in which the favorable opinion for the institution or academic program was approved.

Likewise, the comprehensive assessment may end with the issuance of the opinion in which the National Accreditation Council considers that the academic program or the institution does not meet the conditions for high quality accreditation, in which case, the council, within the framework of confidentiality and within the next business day of the respective meeting of the General Accreditation Chamber, will send its opinion to the institution through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent, along with the relevant recommendations for improvement.

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[4] Article 37 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

## **5. STAGE OF ISSUANCE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ACT GRANTING ACCREDITATION OR PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INSTITUTION**

The high quality accreditation of an institution or academic program shall be certified by a duly reasoned administrative act issued by the Ministry of National Education.

If the National Accreditation Council (CNA) considers that the high quality conditions for accreditation of the academic program or institution have not been achieved, it will issue relevant recommendations for improvement, which shall be communicated to the institution within the framework of confidentiality through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES-CNA) or its equivalent [5]<sup>5</sup>.

### **5.1 Appeals against the act of high quality accreditation**

An appeal for reconsideration may be filed against the administrative act that grants the high quality accreditation of an institution or academic program, in accordance with the terms of Law 1437/2011 or any provisions that amend, repeal or replace it [6]<sup>6</sup>.

### **5.2 Reconsideration of the recommendations of the National Accreditation Council**

The institution may request, through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES - CNA) or its equivalent, the reconsideration of the opinion on recommendations for improvement issued by the National Accreditation Council in the comprehensive assessment of the academic program or institution, within thirty (30) calendar days following the communication of the opinion [7]<sup>7</sup>.

The National Accreditation Council shall study the request for reconsideration and shall decide during the meeting of the General Accreditation Chamber held in the month following or subsequent to the filing date of the request submitted by the institution, by means of an opinion advising the accreditation of the program or institution to the Ministry of National Education, or confirming the opinion of recommendations for improvement. If the opinion is confirmed, the National Accreditation Council shall inform the institution within one business day following the date of the meeting of the General Chamber.

### **5.3 Awarding of High Quality Accreditation**

The Ministry of National Education, with the participation of the National Accreditation Council and the academic community, shall award the institution with the institutional high quality accreditation in a public event.


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[5] Article 38 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

[6] Article 38 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

[7] Article 41 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

**RENEWAL OF  
THE HIGH QUALITY  
ACCREDITATION**



The renewal of institutional or academic program accreditation is a process in which the outcome of the self-assessment and the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations provided in the initial accreditation are verified. As with the initial accreditation, renewal is voluntary and temporary.

In any case, the renewal of accreditation must be requested no less than twelve (12) months [8]<sup>8</sup> prior to the expiration date of the high quality accreditation of the institution or academic program, by submitting the respective self-assessment report.

The assessment process of the institution or academic program focuses on the study, analysis and assessment of the consolidation and projection of the strengths featured by the institution or academic program, to which end the effectiveness of the plans for improvement that state the opportunities for improvement identified throughout the accreditation process and the innovative capacity demonstrated by the institution or academic program will be taken into account.

Likewise, the renewal of accreditation will depend on the comprehensive assessment conducted by the National Accreditation Council of the outcome of the assessment and follow-up visit or visits conducted during the term of accreditation, as established in Article 47 of CESU Agreement 02/2020 and Guide 04 Follow-up and Assessment of Plans for Improvement issued by the National Accreditation Council.

## **PROCEDURE FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE HIGH QUALITY ACCREDITATION**

The procedure to renew the high quality accreditation of the institution or academic program will be carried out by following the stages of self-assessment, external assessment by academic peers, comprehensive assessment and issuance of the administrative act deciding on the request, in the terms set forth in paragraphs 2 to 5 of this guide.

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[8] Article 45 (1) of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

**SITUATIONS THAT  
AFFECT THE HIGH QUALITY  
ACCREDITATION  
PROCEDURE**



The situations that may affect the procedure for the high quality accreditation of academic programs and institutions are suspension and early termination.

### **a) Suspension of the high quality accreditation procedure**

If after having submitted the self-assessment report for the effects of accreditation or renewal of the high quality accreditation of an institution or an academic program, the institution is subject to any preventive or special supervision measures imposed by the Ministry of National Education, the National Accreditation Council shall suspend the high quality accreditation procedure in the stage currently in progress and shall notify such suspension in a timely manner to the Registered Agent of the institution. The suspension of the procedure shall remain in place until the measures imposed on the institution are lifted.

Similarly, the high quality accreditation procedure will be suspended if the Ministry of National Education orders opening preliminary inquiries against the institution, on the basis of its inspection and oversight powers and in the context of the power to impose administrative penalties, pursuant to Law 1740/2014, until a final decision is reached in the investigation [9]<sup>9</sup>.

### **b) Early termination of the high quality accreditation process**

If after having submitted the self-assessment report for the effects of accreditation or renewal of the high quality accreditation of an institution or and academic program, the institution is subject to any penalties due to breach of applicable legal provisions that regulate higher education, the National Accreditation Council shall end the high quality accreditation procedure in the stage currently in progress and shall notify such termination in a timely manner to the Registered Agent of the institution. The same shall apply in the event the valid term of the qualification certification expires during the high quality accreditation procedure of an academic program, pursuant to the provisions of Decree 1075/ 2015 [10]<sup>10</sup>.

## **ANNEX: FLOWCHART ILLUSTRATING THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE**

<https://es.scribd.com/document/491188050/Diagrama-Tramite-de-Acreditacion-CNA-2020>

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[9] Article 42 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

[10] Article 43 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.



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