

CNA

Ministry of National Education
Republic of Colombia

GUIDE 03

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The National Accreditation Council, throughout its 25 years of continuous operation, has conceptualized and built an accreditation model aimed at higher education institutions as part of a system that respects and recognizes university autonomy, diversity and the particularities of institutional contexts, which has allowed the development of guidelines for undergraduate academic programs, master's and doctoral programs, medical-surgical specializations and higher education institutions. As part of the updating of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System undertaken by the Ministry of National Education with the support of the National Higher Education Council (CESU), the National Accreditation Council (CNA), the National Intersectoral Commission for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CONACES, for the Spanish original), the Permanent Quality Commission and the national academic community, the updating of the high quality accreditation model was consolidated through Agreement 02/July 1, 2020 of the National Higher Education Council, and, previously by the amendment of Decree 1075/2015 through Decree 843/2020.

The updating of the high quality accreditation model incorporates the most relevant international trends in accreditation matters and the recommendations provided by national and international organizations that serve as references in these matters, especially those contained in the external assessment reports received in compliance with good practices for certifying agencies, carried out by the National Accreditation Council before the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE, for the Spanish original) and the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RIACES, for the Spanish original). Similarly, it is based on the history and processes of assessment of high quality in the country, building on what is already in place, recognizing the diversity of institutions, the different modalities and levels of academic programs, and the standardization of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System.

For the implementation of Agreement 02/2020 by the National Accreditation Council and the internalization by higher education institutions, and in general by the academic and scientific community, procedural guidelines must be developed to guide the accreditation processes in their different stages and enable their implementation by institutions within their communities and provide them with elements for the construction of the documents that must support the specific stages that the institution shall go through. In order to facilitate the work of the institutions, the guides have been summarized in four documents:

- **Guide 01** refers to the accreditation procedure and explains the steps and timelines.
- **Guide 02** provides guidelines for the initial conditions assessment of academic programs and institutions.
- **Guide 03** provides guidelines for the self-assessment of academic programs and institutions.
- **Guide 04** provides guidelines for carrying out assessment and follow-up visits regarding the improvement plans of both academic programs and institutions.

This guide, "Self-assessment of academic programs and higher education institutions," from the perspective of quality assurance, provides guidelines for institutions to carry out their self-assessment process and structure the corresponding report, in order to undergo external assessment as part of the high quality accreditation process.

The National Accreditation Council explicitly recognizes the different areas and people of the higher education sector, the Minister, the Vice-Minister of Higher Education, the Directorate of Quality, the National Council of Higher Education, the CONACES Chambers, and the Permanent Quality Commission, among others, for their support throughout this process of updating the high quality accreditation model.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, self-assessment should be a permanent practice that enables a critical look at the way institutions assume the development of all the processes involved, in order to systematically monitor the fulfillment of their mission objectives, to analyze the conditions that affect their development and to implement measures for continuous improvement, so as to ensure the quality of the service they offer; in this sense, self-assessment is the central stage of the accreditation process.

The self-assessment process and the corresponding report must be the result of a participatory, responsible and critical endeavor of the members of the academic community and other stakeholders, in order for the great institutional and academic program efforts to be legitimate, serve the purposes of continuous improvement and ensure the commitment to the high quality of the institution and the academic programs.

In this sense, this Guide for self-assessment of academic programs and institutions provides suggestions to facilitate the self-assessment processes for high quality accreditation of academic programs and institutions that decide to move forward in the accreditation process. Given that this is a voluntary and autonomous act, the recommendations provided herein are indicative in nature and therefore constitute a flexible basis from which to draw elements both for developing assessment instruments with characteristics of relevance, validity and reliability, and for consulting the required sources.

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to instruct institutions in the development of the self-assessment process of academic programs and institutions for high quality accreditation and the renewal of accreditation in accordance with the guidelines and aspects to be assessed of academic programs and institutions, as well as for the preparation of the respective report.

The guidelines provided by the National Accreditation Council for the development of self-assessment processes will enable institutions to identify strengths and areas for improvement that will guide the implementation of improvement plans, and in this way, they will have elements that will enable them to support the high quality roadmap of their academic programs and the institution in the accreditation or renewal of high quality accreditation procedures, and in the preparation of the respective report.

It is important to mention that the National Accreditation Council does not intend for this guide to be the only way to implement the self-assessment processes, but rather to provide suggestions that may contribute to the institution's progress in the process, either by using its own model or, if it so wishes, by following the recommendations of the National Accreditation Council. In both cases it is essential to articulate it with the internal quality assurance system.

However, in compliance with the provisions of paragraph a) of Article 34 of Agreement 02/2020 issued by the National Council of Higher Education, and as part of the high quality accreditation model, this guide discusses the essential components that the institution must develop in the self-assessment report for the purpose of high quality accreditation of an academic program or the institution.

The high quality accreditation process, in accordance with the stages established in the current regulations (Article 2.5.3.3.7.3 of Decree 1075/2015, as amended by Decree 843/2020), includes:

- a) Assessment of initial conditions: this is required when the institution expresses its interest in accrediting academic programs or the institution for the first time [1]¹.
- b) Self-assessment carried out by the academic program or institution and the submission of the corresponding self-assessment report to the National Accreditation Council.
- c) External assessment conducted by academic peers appointed by the National Accreditation Council.
- d) Comprehensive assessment of the National Accreditation Council, which issues the opinion on the quality of the academic program or institution and recommends the high quality accreditation to the Ministry of National Education, if applicable.

Resolution granting or renewing the high quality accreditation issued by the Ministry of National Education in the event that the National Accreditation Council has recommended accreditation. If the academic program or institution has not reached the high quality conditions to achieve accreditation, the National Accreditation Council will send an opinion with recommendations for improvement directly to the institution or academic program.

Formal entry into the National Accreditation System shall only be granted when the institution receives an opinion of compliance with the initial conditions and achieves high quality accreditation of at least one academic program for one of its places of development.

An academic program is accreditable if it complies with the requirements established in subsection a) of section 2.3 of Article 2 of CESU Agreement 02/2020, which determines that: "An academic program is accreditable if it is authorized to be offered and provided by the institution and has been operating for at least eight (8) continuous years, verifiable in the National Information System for Higher Education (SNIES, for the Spanish original). The

[1] When the Institution has High Quality Institutional Accreditation, it is not required to carry out the initial conditions assessment for undergraduate academic programs.

academic programs of the professional technical, technological, university, master, medical-surgical specialty and doctoral levels of education are considered to be accreditable.”

A higher education institution is accreditable when it complies with the requirements established in subsections c) and d) of Article 34 of Agreement 02/2020:

- a)** In the case of accreditation by place of development, the institution must have accredited at least thirty percent (30%) of its accreditable academic programs, regardless of the level and modality, in each of the places of development to be included in the accreditation process.
- b)** In the case of multicampus accreditation, the institution must have accredited at least thirty percent (30%) of its accreditable programs at all of its places of development in which academic offerings have been authorized.

When applicable, once the initial conditions assessment stage has been passed, if the institution decides to go on to the self-assessment stage of one or more of its academic programs or of the Institution, it must submit to the National Accreditation Council the corresponding self-assessment report within one year following receipt of the communication of the opinion of compliance with the initial conditions.

The institutional self-assessment process and the submission of the corresponding report must be the result of a participatory, responsible and critical endeavor of the members of the academic community and other stakeholders, in order for the great institutional and academic program efforts to be legitimate, serve the purposes of continuous improvement and ensure the commitment to the high quality of the institution and the academic programs.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS



2. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The consolidation of a culture of quality assessment is a basic premise of all higher education institutions committed to continuous improvement and the pursuit of high quality. In this sense, self-assessment must be a permanent practice that provides a critical view of the way in which institutions and academic programs undertake the development of all processes, in order to ensure the quality of the service they offer.

The success and seriousness of a self-assessment process requires the institution to take the lead of the process and encourage the broad participation of the academic community (students and professors) and other stakeholders such as graduates, employers and any others defined by the institution. It should be considered that in this internal view, the self-study should be undertaken exhaustively, that is, by means of a one by one assessment of the training, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension work, and of the supporting processes, with the fundamental purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses, and proposing improvement plans that aim to improve the quality of the institution or of the academic program undergoing the accreditation process and assuring society and the State that the highest levels of quality are being fulfilled, in accordance with its purposes and objectives.

High quality accreditation is a voluntary mechanism for the constant pursuit of the highest levels of quality by the institutions that join the system. It is based on guidelines approved by the National Council of Higher Education (CESU), in accordance with the recommendations of the National Accreditation Council, which have been previously agreed upon with the national academic community in line with international recommendations and international benchmarks. Compliance with these parameters should lead to continuous improvement and not be merely a reflection of the quality achieved so far. Accreditation is not an oversight and monitoring mechanism to be exercised by the State and, therefore, does not replace it.

It is important to emphasize that in the process of high quality accreditation, the National Accreditation Council gives its opinion taking into consideration the self-assessment of the academic program or institution, the external assessment report by the academic peers appointed by the National Accreditation Council and the comments made by the Registered Agent regarding this report. Based on the comprehensive assessment, the National Accreditation Council issues an opinion that, if it concludes that the academic program or institution has demonstrated high quality, will recommend the recognition or renewal of accreditation to the Ministry of National Education.

The National Accreditation Council takes the opinion of high quality as the basis for the theoretical, conceptual and methodological model of assessment. This concept refers to the characteristics and aspects to be improved that make it possible to recognize the high quality of an academic program or an institution. As part of the framework of the diversity, legal nature, identity, mission and typology of the institution, these considerations lead to the creation of an opinion regarding its capacity for continuous improvement to promote a better way of providing an effective public education service, achieve the expected results and result in the proposed impacts. Thus, the quality of an institution or academic program refers to the universal characteristics of higher education in general, to the generic characteristics corresponding to the ideal historically defined for that type of institution or academic program, and to the specific characteristics that are specific to it, according to its legal nature, identity, mission, typology in the case of institutions and the levels of training and modalities in the case of academic programs.

The concept of high quality, which is part of the updating of the accreditation model, not only considers capabilities and processes, but also includes achievements and results. Quality, thus understood, implies the continuous effort of institutions and academic programs to comply responsibly with the educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities, as well as with the supporting functions: financial management, academic resources, organization, administration and management, and wellbeing, among others.

The elements required for the institution to carry out the self-assessment process for the purpose of academic or institutional program accreditation include:

Table 1. General guidance components

GENERAL GUIDANCE COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Leadership and participation	The directors of the institution and the academic program must take the lead and promote the participation and commitment of the different stakeholders in the self-assessment activities, to ensure the legitimacy of the process and of the improvement actions derived therefrom. They must also commit to financially support the self-assessment process and the implementation of the quality improvement proposals resulting from this process.
Clarity and transparency	The institution and the academic programs must have policies in place to explain the purposes and objectives of the self-assessment process to the entire academic community. It is important for there to be clarity and transparency in the execution and development of the self-assessment process, in order to create a climate of trust and security and to provide a critical and responsible view of all the components of the process.
Organization and coordination	As part of the framework of the internal quality assurance system, it is advisable to define those in charge of planning, directing and coordinating the self-assessment process, reviewing the final report and supporting each academic program or the institution for the purpose of guiding the development of the self-assessment process, drafting the final report, finding solutions and coordinating strategies to support and introduce the changes required to improve quality.
Training	It is essential that the individuals involved in the self-assessment process for institutional and academic program accreditation purposes, especially those who lead the process, be familiar with the contents of the high quality accreditation model defined in Agreement 02/2020, the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Academic Programs", the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Institutions" and the guidelines and technical documents issued by the National Accreditation Council, as the case may be.
Articulation with planning	It is essential that the institution and the academic programs use the results of the self-assessment process to develop and implement quality improvement plans and projects, which are incorporated into institutional planning and are duly articulated with the internal quality assurance system.
Information quality	The development of the self-assessment process requires sufficient, reliable, valid, transparent and relevant information to issue an opinion regarding compliance with the characteristics and to make decisions on quality improvement.

For the sole purpose of facilitating the self-assessment process, the National Accreditation Council deems it advisable to offer the following suggestions for the consideration of higher education institutions:

Table 2. Specific guidance components

SPECIFIC GUIDANCE COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	SUGGESTED SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES
PARTICIPATION	<p>The participation of the academic community and stakeholder representatives defined by the institution in the self-assessment processes requires opening the necessary spaces for communication and coordination, allowing access to all the necessary information for the construction of supported and reasoned opinions regarding quality, through the actions of all participants in the various processes carried out by the programs and the institution. The participation of representatives of all stakeholders such as graduates and employers, among others, is also very important.</p>	<p>As part of the internal quality assurance system, set up an institutional self-assessment committee to design the self-assessment model and guide and coordinate the various processes. Take into account the professors, students and other stakeholders defined by the institution.</p>
COMMUNICATION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create mechanisms to inform professors, students, directors and staff involved, the policies and the self-assessment model, the timetable of activities related to the self-assessment and accreditation processes, as well as the results obtained in each of the phases of the process to achieve greater participation and a sense of involvement of all stakeholders of the program or the institution. This is a communication strategy that will allow the representatives of the different stakeholders declared by the institution to participate in the process, to be a part of it and to assume it as a condition to make the self-assessment processes legitimate and to create a quality culture based on self-assessment and continuous improvement.
COORDINATION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct workshops with those who will be involved in the self-assessment, in order to analyze the document "Guidelines for Program Accreditation", with a view to familiarizing them with the accreditation model and training them in procedural aspects. • Define the instruments and methods for collecting the necessary and relevant information to carry out the self-assessment process.

2.1 Preparation and Coordination of Teams

In order to structure a self-assessment process with solid foundations, the National Accreditation Council recommends initially carrying out a series of strategic activities for a coherent and aligned development with the same intention of accreditation of the institution or academic programs. Strategic preparation includes:

- a) Consolidating institutional policies and guidelines regarding the quality of academic programs and the institution. The institution's management must take the lead and show its commitment to the self-assessment process, that is, demonstrate that the institution has an internal quality assurance system and has consolidated a culture of self-assessment and continuous improvement supported by the necessary resources aimed at achieving high quality.

- b) Communicating and socializing to the entire academic community the details and progress of the self-assessment process. In this regard, communication is presented as a key tool that consolidates quality in a comprehensive manner.
- c) Having a team that, through the Institution's internal quality assurance system, supports and backs the self-assessment processes, as well as the creation of self-assessment committees and teams geared towards the coordination, leadership and development of such processes.

2.2 Internal Quality Assurance System

The strengthening of quality assurance in higher education, discussed in Decree 1330/2019 and CESU Agreement 02/2020, is aimed at ensuring the quality of academic offerings in all modalities and the high quality of institutions and academic programs, as evidence of continuous improvement and international benchmarks. In order to achieve this strengthening, it is essential that higher education institutions make progress in consolidating their own internal quality assurance system as part of the culture of quality and the harmonization of the procedures of qualification certification and accreditation.

Decree 1075/2015, the only regulatory decree of the education sector, in Article 2.5.3.2.3.1.4, as amended by Decree 1330/2019, states:

“Self-assessment culture: It is the set of mechanisms that institutions have in place for the systematic follow-up of the fulfillment of their mission objectives, the analysis of conditions that affect their development and the measures for continuous improvement. This culture aims to ensure that academic programs are offered and developed under quality conditions and that institutions are accountable to the community, society and the State for the educational services they provide.

The institution must demonstrate the existence, disclosure and implementation of institutional policies that promote self-assessment, self-regulation and improvement in accordance with its legal nature, typology, identity and institutional mission, in order to foster the shared responsibility of the entire academic community in continuous improvement.

The institution must have an internal quality assurance system that includes at least the following:

- a) The systematization, management and use of the necessary information to be able to propose and implement improvement measures, taking into account the information recorded in the higher education information systems.
- b) Mechanisms to demonstrate the evolution of compliance with the conditions of quality of academic results.
- c) Mechanisms that gather the appraisal of the academic community and the different stakeholders in order to contribute to the process.
- d) Articulation of improvement programs with the planning and general budget of the institution.
- e) Mechanisms that allow continuous processes of self-assessment and self-regulation reflected in periodic reports established according to the duration of the programs subject to qualification certification”.

Additionally, and in line with the regulatory update associated with the quality assurance of higher education, higher education institutions must demonstrate that the internal quality assurance system has articulated mechanisms for the self-assessment, planning and follow-up of improvement plans, that they are used effectively for decision making and include the management of various types of indicators for a comprehensive follow-up of the institution and are aimed at promoting continuous quality improvement. The foregoing, in line with the different educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities, and with the different levels of education and modalities of their academic programs.

As stated in CESU Agreement 02/2020, at the level of academic programs, the internal quality assurance system accounts for the academic results achieved and provides evidence of achievements in academic aspects and learning outcomes, interaction in the national and international environment, contributions in research, innovation, technological development and creation, associated with the academic program in accordance with the level of education thereof [2]².

2.3 Design of the Self-Assessment Model based on the Guidelines of the National Accreditation Council

The institution must design a self-assessment model articulated with the internal quality assurance system, based on a quality improvement policy issued by its governing bodies. This model will be the basis on which the other phases of the self-assessment process will be based, so it must reflect all the specificities of the institution or academic program that ensure high quality. It is important to note that the self-assessment process and the design of the respective report should reflect in an integral manner the functioning of the internal quality assurance systems, so that the self-assessment exercises are not viewed as isolated moments that require specific temporary personnel, but rather as the development of continuous quality improvement processes.

For the accreditation process, the National Accreditation Council has identified the corresponding factors as pillars for the assessment of academic programs and institutions, which must be viewed from a systemic perspective, since they are expressed interdependently. The factors defined in the accreditation model of the National Accreditation Council, both for academic programs and institutions, are components of high quality, and their assessment process is based on a logic that can be grouped into four dynamics that are applicable to both academic programs and institutions:

Say what you do

- A high quality academic program must have a clear foundation, consistent with its mission, vision and institutional education project, and clearly expressed in its program educational project. These elements must be clearly known and appropriated by the academic community. Additionally, they must provide true, ethical and verifiable information to the community, and demonstrate that it is done in this manner.

Do what you say

- A high-quality academic program must show great consistency between what it says it does and what it does to achieve it, which is reflected in its highly qualified faculty, quality teaching, excellent scientific research, recognized artistic creation, outstanding students, adequate funding sources, and academic freedom.

Prove it

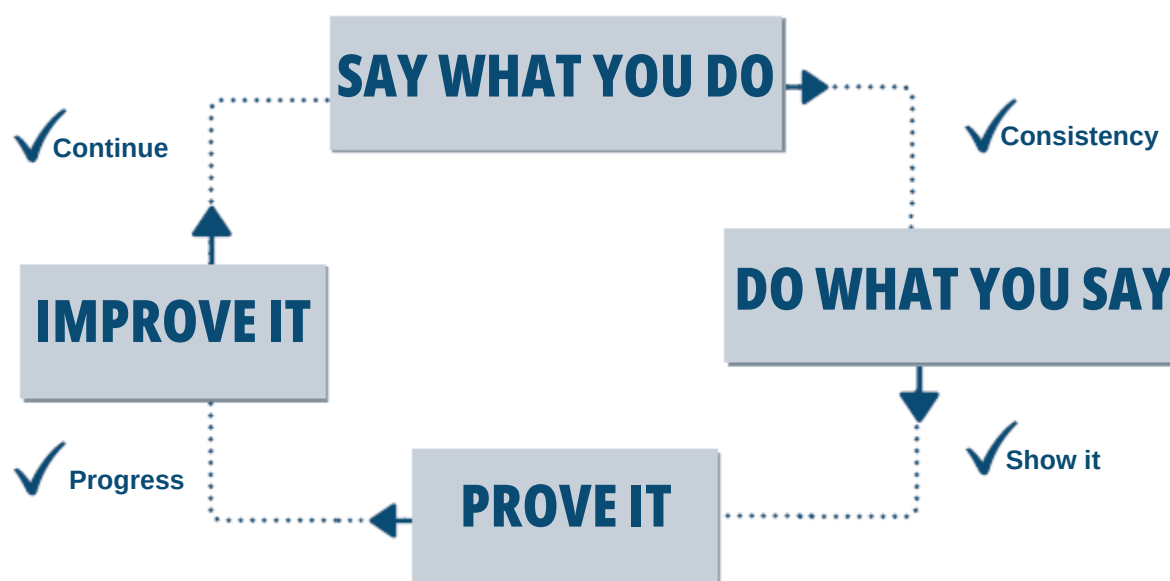
- A high quality academic program must demonstrate the high quality of what it says and what it does through processes of self-regulation, self-assessment and external assessment, supported by reliable and comprehensive information systems.

Improve it

- A high-quality academic program must demonstrate that it has a continuous improvement and innovation plan that responds to the needs shown by the self-assessment processes.

[2] Subsection a) of Article 15 of Agreement 02/2020.

Figure 1. Assessment dynamics of the factors identified for the self-assessment process



In the design of the self-assessment model adopted by the institution, factors and characteristics will be assessed at the discretion of the participants in the self-assessment process in order for it to be assumed as something meaningful that adds value to the process. Remember that weighting refers to the differentiated recognition of the importance of the various factors and characteristics assessed and the assignment of relative values within the set to which they belong.

It is a comprehensive assessment; therefore, the opinions and appraisals regarding quality made by the institution and subsequently contrasted by academic peers are very relevant. Thus, only considering the numerical results of the self-assessment or placing too much emphasis on the weighting can distort the actual quality situation of the academic program or the institution, so it is important to consider the context and particularities associated with the level of education and modality in the case of academic programs; and the nature, structure and environment in the case of institutions. Likewise, the improvement plan resulting from the self-assessment process must constitute an commitment for the institution and the academic program in particular, fully articulated with the institution's development plans, so that it receives the support, resources and follow-up necessary for its successful implementation.

2.4 Data Collection

Based on the agreed self-assessment model, the group responsible for the self-assessment process of the academic program or institution, with the guidance of those responsible for the internal quality assurance system and the institutional committee, will proceed to collect the necessary information to demonstrate the progress of each of the factors, characteristics and aspects to be assessed in the last five (5) years [3]³.

In cases of accreditation renewal, compliance with the improvement plan agreed upon as a result of the previous accreditation must also be reported, and therefore, this information is part of the self-assessment process.

[3] The institutions that enter the National Accreditation System are free to use their own instruments to collect information and to define characteristics and aspects to be further assessed. Article 19 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

2.4.1 Sources of information

For the self-assessment process, the following sources of information are taken into account, according to their origin, documentary and stakeholder sources.

a) Documentary

These sources allow for the accurate and precise identification of information related to various aspects of the institutional dynamics, such as the institutional education project and the program's education project; policies, rules and regulations for the development of all mission and supporting processes, institutional planning and assessment, organizational structure, functions of the various units, management and availability of financial, educational and infrastructure resources, management reports and the institution's development status in its mission aspects. The documents constitute the formal statement of institutional purposes, commitments, regulations and lines of action; in this sense, they are evidence of the philosophy that inspires and motivates all the actions of the institutional community.

Documentary sources are also related to information provided by external systems, such as: the Ministry of National Education (SNIES, SPADIES and OLE, among others), the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (GrupLac, CvLac and Publindex), ICFES (Saber Pro and T&T) and ICETEX, among others. The self-assessment process requires identifying the key documents to respond to each of the aspects that need to be assessed, classifying and analyzing them in order to extract valuable elements to develop opinions regarding compliance and to establish the consistency between what the institution and the program say they are and what is actually observed in practice.

b) Stakeholders

The members of the academic community and the external sector are the stakeholders and the main figures responsible for the facts being assessed and will be able to identify and express strengths and weaknesses. The stakeholders represent particular roles within the institution and the academic program, so it is essential to understand and define on what issues and based on what criteria they will participate. To the extent that there is greater participation of representatives of the academic community, there will be a greater commitment, increasing the sense of belonging, making it possible to advance in the goals of the academic program and the institution, and with the principles of self-assessment, for their development and improvement.

Consultation with the academic community is necessary to identify their assessment of the development of various institutional processes based on their functions and role within the institution and the academic program. A brief list of the stakeholders and the relevance of their participation in the self-assessment process is provided in Table 1 below.

Each institution or academic program must decide, according to its circumstances or complexity, the most appropriate sources for collecting the required information. The suggestion of multiple sources corresponds to the diverse nature of the aspects to be assessed and the need for greater reliability of the information by contrasting it with more than one source (documentary or stakeholder) and thus ensure that the information is consistent, complete and unbiased. The selection of sources must be based on the principles of relevance and suitability. Relevance has to do with identifying the best information for the item under analysis; and suitability means having sufficient data to make strictly reasoned opinions regarding compliance.

Table 3. Stakeholders and their relevance in the self-assessment process.

STAKEHOLDERS	RELEVANCE IN PARTICIPATION IN THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS
Professors	Their commitment to training, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and outreach activities, as well as to internationalization, is the core of a program's quality. This leading role makes them especially important in the process of reflection and analysis, both on their own work and on the set of policies and academic and administrative resources that support the quality of a program.
Students	The students are the main figures and at the same time the recipients of the educational process of the program and of the institution, who will give an account not only of their satisfaction with the educational process, but also of their degree of commitment and participation.
Administrative and management personnel	They are a privileged source for obtaining first-hand information about the organization and internal processes of a program in the institutional context.
Graduates	In their professional practice, graduates represent to society the educational process experienced in the academic program; therefore, they are capable of reflecting on, giving an account of said process and comparing it with their actions in society of which they are a part. The impact of the graduates' performance on society is an indication of the quality of the program.
Employers, entrepreneurs, government agencies, and other entities	These are the people who interact with graduates in the work environment and, in this regard, have a vision of the quality of the educational processes, the relevance and suitability of the program and evidence the contribution of the program or the Institution to social, scientific and technological development, through its graduates.

2.4.2 Instruments of the self-assessment process

Data collection also requires the definition and use of valid and reliable instruments to ensure the security of the information obtained and to base the development of opinions regarding compliance on this information. The instruments must be developed in accordance with the structure and nature of the institution or the level and modality or modalities of the academic program. In all cases, the instruments must comply with the two fundamental characteristics of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the fact that the instrument collects information with a minimum degree of error, while the validity of an instrument refers to the degree to which it actually measures what it is intended to measure.

According to the foregoing, it is advisable to use data collection instruments that allow rigorous, valid and reliable access to the different sources, in order to respond to the set of aspects to be assessed that aim to identify each and every one of the characteristics provided in Agreement 02/2020 and developed in the Guidelines of academic programs and institutions, as the case may be. As an example, the various institutional or external stakeholders defined by the institution, regarding the development of institutional processes and the academic program may be consulted through surveys, interviews, workshops, and focus groups, among others. In all cases, this is done using thoroughly validated instruments.

It is advisable that consultation with the stakeholders defined by the institution go beyond a simple assessment, and enable the identification of proposals for lines of action in order to have an improvement plan that can turn the aspects to be improved into strengths, and involve the institution's management and the stakeholders directly responsible for the institution or the academic program.

In all cases, the information collected using these instruments must be organized, analyzed and processed so as to discuss in a clear, consistent and complete manner the opinion regarding the quality of the characteristics and factors of the institution as a whole and of the program in particular.

2.4.3 Issuing opinions

Once the data collection and organization process has been completed, the information is interpreted and the resulting opinions are issued. In all these processes, differentiated readings of the characteristics will be made, in accordance with the level of education and modality or modalities of the program, or the nature and typology of the Institution and, the specificity of the education project of the program, the mission, the institutional education project and the institutional identity.

The comprehensive opinion on the quality of the academic program or the institution can be issued with or without the intermediation of numerical equivalents; what is fundamental is the reasoning and evidence that support such opinion. Both in the case of self-assessment by institutions and external peer assessment, the relative importance of the characteristics is related to qualitative considerations and ideas about education and training in the different fields of education and training. This requires a critical analysis of the appraisals made by the various stakeholders involved in the assessments.

Although subjectivity in opinions cannot be altogether eliminated, critical control can be exercised through the contrast of reasoned opinions and through intersubjectivity. For this reason, emphasis is made on self-assessment being a participatory process, and the opinion of the academic peers and internal evaluators defined by the institution must be the result of a team consensus.

In order to state how close the characteristics are to the ideal target, non-numerical scales such as the one presented below can be used:

- a)** Full compliance
- b)** High level of compliance
- c)** Acceptable compliance
- d)** Unsatisfactory compliance
- e)** Non-compliance

The National Accreditation Council only suggests this scale model, and the institution or academic program may use this or any other scale deemed advisable at its discretion for identifying during the self-assessment process the quality of the institution or academic program to be accredited.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that the opinion on the quality of the academic program or the Institution refers to the evidence of effective progress achieved at the time of the self-assessment, in relation to each characteristic; i.e., for this qualification, the improvement plans and future implementation purposes provided by the institutional guidelines must not be considered as progress. However, the institution can provide evidence of the actions it is taking to achieve a higher degree of compliance with a given characteristic.

Opinions regarding the compliance of each set of characteristics will enable an overall assessment of the quality of each factor and, in turn, opinions on the compliance of factors will enable an overall assessment of the quality of the academic program or institution.

As outlined in the technical documents "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Academic Programs" and "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Institutions" and in this guide, the National Accreditation Council considers that the opinion regarding the quality of an academic program or an institution is a fundamentally qualitative process based on a comprehensive analysis of the quality characteristics and the factors that group them together. Referring to the need to consider each and every characteristic, aims to ensure that the assessment is complete and that it enables the detection of specific deficiencies and developments, in addition to overall strengths and weaknesses.

The renewal of the accreditation will always be based on the previous process and, consequently, any achievements attained in response to the improvement plan derived therefrom, its assessment of compliance and the conclusions of the assessment of such plans by the National Accreditation Council.

At the end of the development of opinions on compliance with the quality characteristics, the results of the self-assessment should be discussed with the different representatives or stakeholders defined by the institution and with other areas of the institution in the case of the academic programs, so that these debates may clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the academic program or institution, verifying the degree of compliance with the improvement plan and giving rise to institutional commitments for continuous improvement.

2.4.4 The Self-Assessment Report

The self-assessment report contains the result of the opinion of compliance developed by the institution or academic program, regarding the service offered, achievements and impacts, based on Agreement 02/2020, the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Academic Programs", the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Institutions" and the guidelines and technical documents issued by the National Accreditation Council, as the case may be. This report must have a main body and be accompanied by the necessary annexes to verify the information contained therein supporting the opinions regarding quality, as well as the methodology and criteria used in developing these opinions.

The main body of the report (which should be no more than 100 pages) must contain a summary of the results of the analysis and opinions regarding compliance with the characteristics, based on the aspects to be assessed and the overall assessment of each factor.

In the case of academic programs that have a single qualification certification, submit a single self-assessment report that includes all the information of the modalities and places of development that are part of the qualification certification, which will be assessed jointly and concurrently [4]⁴.

In the case of an academic program that is curricularly designed by preparatory cycles, submit a single self-assessment report containing all the programs included in the qualification certification, not separately [5]⁵.

Institutions opting for multicampus accreditation must submit for assessment the places of development in municipalities or districts located in Special Categories 1 and 2, through a single self-assessment report. The corresponding regionalization plan and progress report must be submitted for places of development in other categories [6]⁶.

2.4.5 Report Contents

2.4.5.1 Introduction

The introduction must include a brief description of the self-assessment process, the methodology used and the degree of participation of the various institutional and social stakeholders in the self-assessment process of the program or institution. It must also include a brief description of the contents of the self-assessment report.

2.4.5.2 General aspects of the institution or academic program

Presentation of the academic program and its role in the institution. This chapter must include any aspect that the academic program considers should be highlighted.

In the case of the self-assessment process for institutional accreditation purposes, these aspects must account for all institutional developments and achievements in all dimensions of the institutional activity.

[4] Subsection c) of Article 33 of Agreement 02/2020.

[5] Subsection d) of Article 33 of Agreement 02/2020.

[6] Subsection b) of Article 7 of Agreement 02/2020.

2.4.5.3 Result of the self-assessment

This chapter presents the results of the self-assessment of each of the factors and characteristics of the high quality accreditation model, defined in Agreement 02/2020 and developed in the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of Academic Programs" and the "Guidelines and aspects to be assessed of institutions", as the case may be. Therefore, this chapter must have at least 12 sections, one for each factor. Each section provides an analysis of the characteristics and aspects assessed regarding each factor. At the end of each section, the conclusion of the degree to which each factor meets the ideal defined by the academic program or the Institution must be provided. This is called the "interpretative assessment of the quality of each factor", which implies a solid reasoning of the aspects assessed, based on empirical evidence of the quality that is being perceived in the program or institution under assessment for accreditation purposes.

2.4.5.4 Strengths and areas for improvement of the program and explicit opinion on its quality.

The fourth component of the self-assessment report is a chapter providing a brief summary. Based on the analysis presented in the previous chapter, the strengths and areas for improvement of the program or institution must be emphasized. It must also include a final assessment that expresses an explicit opinion on the quality of the academic program or institution.

2.4.5.5 Improvement plan

Finally, the self-assessment report must present the improvement plan, which must include the projects and activities to consolidate its strengths and the actions being taken or planned to be taken in the short, medium and long term to develop its opportunities for improvement.

The improvement plan must be organized by projects, which must include activities, management indicators and goals to monitor their development, a timetable, responsible parties and resources for their financing. Institutional planning must be articulated with improvement plans.

2.4.5.6 Annexes

The annexes are the supporting documents used as the basis for opinions regarding the quality of characteristics and factors. The annexes also contain supplementary information on the methodology used by the institution for collecting data and on the criteria, methods and instruments used in developing the opinions.

2.4.5.7 Presentation of the Report to the National Accreditation Council

Regarding the terms, once the initial conditions have been approved (in the case of requests for first-time accreditation of undergraduate and graduate programs and institutions), the request for accreditation (the self-assessment report with the respective annexes) must be submitted within a maximum term of one year, and if this term is not met, a new visit to assess the initial conditions must be requested.

The self-assessment report must be submitted to the National Accreditation Council through the SACES-CNA information system or its equivalent.

**ACCREDITATION
GUIDELINES FOR
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS
AND INSTITUTIONS**



3. ACCREDITATION GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS

The guidelines for the high quality accreditation of academic programs and institutions are comprised of factors, characteristics and aspects to be assessed, which are defined as follows [7]⁷:

- a) Factors**
 - Factors are the set of processes, products and impacts involved in the achievement of the mission objectives of an institution and its academic programs. The factors identified as pillars for the assessment must be viewed from a systemic perspective, since they are expressed in an interdependent manner. They are developed based on characteristics.
- b) Characteristics**
 - Characteristics are the elements that describe each factor and determine its potential quality, thus enabling the distinction between them. The quality characteristics of the high quality accreditation model are inherent to higher education and indicate universal and particular references of high quality that can be applicable to all types of academic programs in accordance with their modality and level of education, and to all types of institutions considering their legal nature, identity, mission and type.
- c) Aspects to be assessed**
 - These are the elements that provide insight into and measure the characteristics according to quantitative and qualitative information of the academic programs and institution. They also enable the observation or analysis of performance and continuous improvement in a given context, with the aim of determining, to the extent possible and reliable, the degree of quality achieved.

The opinion issued by the National Accreditation Council regarding the high quality of an academic program or institution is the result of an integrated analysis of the corresponding factors that make up the model. Each factor in turn is examined based on a solid integrated consideration of the different high quality characteristics that constitute it. The degree of fulfillment of each high quality characteristic must be established by means of a thorough analysis of the different aspects to be assessed incorporated in the specific high quality assessment criteria of the National Accreditation Council, which are an integral part of the guidelines.

In the case of renewal of the high quality accreditation of an academic program that, by virtue of the accreditation incentives, has extended its offer to other places of development, they will be assessed in accordance with the criteria determined for such purpose by the National Accreditation Council.

In the case of the renewal of the high quality accreditation of an academic program that has opted for the single qualification certification, new offers in modality and places of development will be assessed in accordance with the criteria determined for such purpose by the National Accreditation Council.

[7] Article 14 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

3.1 Factors and Characteristics for Academic Programs [8].⁸

An institution must demonstrate its ongoing effort to consolidate its identity through an organizational culture based on continuous improvement and academic innovation, which, in the case of high quality academic programs, is perceptible in each of the following factors:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Education project of the program and institutional identity.	Students	Professors	Graduates	Academic aspects and learning outcomes	Permanence and graduation	Interaction with the national and international environment
8	9	10	11	12		
Contributions of research, innovation, technological development and creation, associated with the academic program	Well-being of the program's academic community	Educational media and learning environments	Organization, management and financing of the academic program	Physical and technological resources		

The above factors are assessed according to characteristics corresponding to universal and particular references of high quality, which are demonstrated in accordance with aspects to be assessed by distinguishing the levels (professional technician, technological, university, medical-surgical specialty, master and doctorate), and the modalities (face-to-face, distance, virtual, hybrid and the combinations or integrations thereof).

[8] Articles 16 and 17 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

3.2 Factors and Characteristics for Institutions [9]⁹

Assessing the high quality of institutions involves a complex exercise that cannot set aside its interpretative nature. The comprehensive assessment conducted by the National Accreditation Council, in turn, interprets the meaning of a fact in a specific institutional and social context, framed in the legal nature, identity, mission and type of institution.

For the purposes of assessment for the high quality accreditation of institutions, the factors are as follows:


1	Institutional identity	2	Institutional governance and transparency	3	Institutional development, governance and sustainability	4	Continuous improvement and self-regulation
5	Academic structure and processes	6	Contributions of research, innovation, technological development and creation	7	Social impact	8	National and international visibility
9	Institutional well-being	10	Community of professors	11	Community of students	12	Graduate community

The above factors are assessed according to characteristics of universal and particular high quality references, which are demonstrated in accordance with the aspects to be assessed.

It is important to reaffirm that the institutions that enter the National Accreditation System are free to use their own instruments to collect information and to define characteristics and aspects to be further assessed.

[9] Article 19 of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

**SUPPLEMENTARY
INFORMATION AND
MASTER TABLES**



4. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND MASTER TABLES

The National Accreditation Council will use the SNIES information as the primary source of the program or institution information submitted for high quality accreditation, and the Master Tables, which contain information to be completed by the institutions based on the forms available on the CNA website: <https://www.cna.gov.co>.

5. DEFINITIONS

In order to complement the definitions contained in Agreement 02/2020 issued by the CESU, the National Accreditation Council includes the following.

Regionalization Plan

A Regionalization Plan is defined as the Institution's strategy to reach several places of development either with its own offering or in an agreement, in one or more modalities. This plan must be approved as a policy by the corresponding governing body (Senior Council, Board of Directors or their equivalent).

In order to offer undergraduate or postgraduate programs in municipalities other than Special categories 1 and 2, the institution must submit an assessment of the regionalization plan that includes commitments to improve in accordance with their level of development. This plan must contain at least:

- a) Information about the characteristics of the program offerings**
 - Number of cohorts, target population and program relevance studies.
- b) Performance indicators for this offering**
 - Dropout and graduation rates, Saber Pro and T&T test results, and graduate performance.
- c) Institutional conditions of the offering**
 - Availability and access to infrastructure, wellbeing and extension.

The regionalization plan must include the places of development in which the institution uses physical spaces for the development of academic programs in an agreement with other entities or institutions. In the case of regionalized academic programs, it must be shown that according to their regionalization or rural education model, professors are sufficient in terms of number, hours and level of education, the forms of interaction and academic communication between professors and students have been assessed and improved in order to achieve the learning outcomes for their students.

Places of Development

The municipality or district where the Ministry of National Education authorizes an institution to provide the public service of higher education, by granting the qualification certification for an academic program [10]¹⁰.

As for the assessment of academic programs for expansion of the place of development, the condition related to professors shall recognize the different regionalization models existing in the country and it shall be an absolute prerequisite for the offering and development of an academic program under this condition that the institution has

[10] Subsection c) of Article 2 (2.3) of CESU Agreement 02/2020.

professors contracted as staff for the municipalities where it intends to expand. Likewise, for the condition associated with educational resources and learning environments, the institution must ensure the availability and use of educational resources for the creation of learning environments consistent with the expected outcomes and in accordance with the level of education and modality.

Tutoring centers as part of the distance learning strategy

These are physical spaces that are part of the distance learning strategy where students attend in order to carry out activities that support the teaching, learning and assessment processes. Therefore, they are the places of development of an academic program that are considered for the distance modality. In these cases, the institution must submit to the Ministry of National Education the internal certificate of creation of the respective tutoring center for the approval of the academic program offered at these centers.

Virtual campuses as part of the virtual learning strategy

The virtual campus is understood as a digital environment, perceived and experienced audiovisually, whose purpose is the symbolic interaction of a community through technological mediation for the transfer, exchange, negotiation, transformation and co-creation of meanings (knowledge, practices and values).

The virtual campus considers the use of an LMS (Learning Management System) platform installed on a web server used to manage, distribute and control the non-classroom educational activities of a given community. This platform must allow permanent and stable access to all educational resources and strategies designed for a large number of simultaneous users and for all members of the academic community when they are not connected simultaneously.

In turn, the platform must consider audiovisual learning environments for the development of e-learning activities in synchronous interactions among members of the academic community, such as counseling, exchanges, discussions, dissertations and general interactions with their own academic community, and with other communities or stakeholders, both national and foreign. The virtual campus must also consider different resources and environments for creation and co-creation, both synchronous and asynchronous, to promote and enable autonomous and independent work, as well as collaborative work. The virtual campus must allow for a supported assessment practice that integrates and encourages collaborative work, dialog and continuous interaction among students and between students and professors, as well as self-assessment and co-assessment processes, and provide immediate feedback, in order to make students aware of their own achievements and difficulties in their learning process.

The adoption of this strategy must contribute to the improvement of the quality of the academic processes intended to be carried out, and must be perceived in this manner through the satisfaction of their participants: of the professors to guide their effective teaching and of the students to achieve learning. Therefore, the adoption of the virtual campus by an institution must not only consider the acquisition of technological and computer resources for carrying out the different training activities (in teaching, research and social outreach). In addition and consistent with the above, an academic and administrative structure must exist or be prepared to respond to the operational model, especially the action regarding the management of information for all interactions mediated by digital technologies. They must also be recognized in guiding documents such as the pedagogical model, the educational project and the institutional pedagogical aspects that guide it, which can be supplemented by other institutional policies that support and harmonize the use of digital technologies to enable, renew, transform and improve the teaching and learning processes.



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