

PROTOCOL

RENEWAL OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTRES

(Approved at the REACU meeting on 15 January 2020)

1. Introduction

Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29 May, on the creation, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, introduces the institutional accreditation model for public and private university centres, from which a special procedure is established for the renewal of the accreditation of official qualifications, set out in article 27.ter. in *Royal Decree 1393/2007, of 29 October, which establishes the organisation of official university education*, whereby universities whose centres have obtained institutional accreditation may, while maintaining their effects, renew the accreditation of the official qualifications they teach without having to undergo the general procedure by programmes (renewal of programme accreditation) established in article 27.bis of *Royal Decree 1393/2007*.

The institutional accreditation model is a further step in the process of co-responsibility in quality assurance, transferring to the universities the responsibility for the processes that guarantee compliance with the project contained in the verified study plans and the continuous improvement of the training offered to students, and consolidating the certification and accreditation functions of the external assessment bodies determined in the university legislation.

Thus, the institutional accreditation of universities is based on ensuring the results of programmes, through a certification of the implementation of their internal quality assurance systems (IQAS), which respond to the criteria and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose dual purpose is responsibility and improvement, which contribute to ensuring the training of students and to generating public confidence in universities.

Consequently, certification of the implementation of the IQAS is one of the requirements to be met by universities in order to obtain institutional accreditation, along with the renewal of the initial accreditation of at least half of the official degrees and at least half of the official master's degrees that they teach in accordance with the general procedure. In accordance with the relevant provisions of *Royal Decree 420/2015*, in order to issue this certificate the external assessment bodies must follow the protocol that, at the proposal of the Ministry responsible for Universities, was established by the Delegate Commission of the University General Policy Conference at its session of 21 November 2017, and which has been incorporated as an annex to the Resolution of 7 March 2018 of the General Secretariat for Universities, which lays down instructions on the procedure for the institutional accreditation of public and private university centres.

In turn, *Royal Decree 420/2015* also establishes that the procedure developed by external assessment bodies to carry out the renewal of institutional accreditation of university centres must follow the general protocol that, at the proposal of the Ministry responsible for universities, is established within the University General Policy Conference.

That is the purpose of this protocol, drawn up from proposals made by the Spanish Network of Higher Education QA Agencies (REACU).

2. Procedure for institutional re-accreditation

2.1. The renewal of the accreditation of the centres, or institutional re-accreditation, will be dictated by a resolution of the Consejo de Universidades, which must take place within five years from the date of obtaining the first or subsequent accreditation resolution of Consejo de Universidades.

2.2. In order to renew institutional accreditation, university centres must demonstrate the effectiveness of their Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) as an instrument for

monitoring, analysing and making decisions about the training programmes of official university degree and master's degrees taught at the centre, in order to ensure their results and their continuous improvement.

2.3. The university will request the renewal of the institutional accreditation of its centres from the external assessment body of the autonomous community in whose territory the university is established and which is registered in the European Quality Agency Register (EQAR), in sufficient time for the procedure to be resolved within the established time limit.

Failing that, the university will make such a request to the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA).

In the case of the Universidad Nacional a Distancia and the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo, the competent assessment body is the ANECA.

2.4. The application shall be made in accordance with the model established by the corresponding assessment body, and shall contain the following information:

- Applicant university.
- Responsible, legal representative and applicant.
- Centre for which renewal of accreditation is requested: code and name, in accordance with the data registered in the Register of Universities, Centres and Programmes (RUCT)
- Certification from the Rector, stating the list of all the official Degrees and Master's degrees being taught at the date of application at the centre whose accreditation is being renewed, including the name, code and status of each one, in accordance with the data registered at the RUCT, and expressly stating that the related programmes are being taught effectively as of the date of application.

2.5. The application will simultaneously contemplate the renewal of the certification of the implementation of the IQAS, through an evaluation process coupled with that carried out for the renewal of the institutional accreditation of the centre.

In the event that the university decides not to request simultaneous renewals, the application to renew the centre's institutional accreditation must be accompanied by a certificate of the implementation of the IQAS of the centre that is in force at the date of the application.

2.6. The application shall be accompanied by the following documentation:

- Self-assessment report by the centre on the effectiveness of its IQAS (in the sense of paragraph 2.2), in accordance with the assessment criteria established in this protocol, covering the period between the date of obtaining the last resolution of institutional accreditation from the Consejo de Universidades and the date of application.
- Evidences supporting the self-assessment report.

2.7. The external evaluation body will prepare an evaluation report that is binding on the Consejo de Universidades, which may be favourable or unfavourable.

This report shall be mandatory for the Consejo de Universidades and may suspend the maximum period of time for resolving and notifying the resolution of the procedure, under the terms provided in paragraph d, section 1 of Article 22 of Law 39, of 1st October, on the Common Administrative Procedure of Public Administrations. The assessment body shall notify the university of the suspension of this period, which shall count from the date of registration of the application by the university. This notification will be attached to the file. If this period is not suspended, the assessment body will have a maximum of five months to issue the report, starting from the date of registration of the application.

The evaluation will be carried out by a panel of external and independent experts from the university applying for renewal of institutional accreditation, appointed in each case by the respective external evaluation bodies, and will include a visit to the university.

Prior to issuing the assessment report, the external evaluation body will prepare a proposal for a report which will be expressed in favourable or unfavourable terms, indicating in the latter case the weaknesses detected which prevent a favourable report. The proposal will be sent to

the university, so that it can present allegations, and if necessary an improvement plan, within 20 working days.

Once the deadline has expired and the allegations and improvement plan have been assessed, if applicable, the external assessment body will issue the assessment report, which will be sent to the Consejo de Universidades and the Autonomous Community, together with the application data and the documentation provided by the university, by means of a submission form or web service enabled for this purpose.

The university will be notified when the report is sent. This notification will have, in cases where the period for resolving and notifying the resolution of the procedure has been suspended, the effect of notifying the university of the end of the suspension.

The scope of the report will also have an effect on the renewal of the certification of the centre's IQAS implementation, unless the university has previously renewed the certificate by another means.

2.8. Once the report of the assessment body has been received, the Consejo de Universidades will issue the corresponding resolution within six months, starting from the date of registration of the university's application. This decision shall be communicated to the Ministry responsible for Universities, to the Autonomous Community, to the applicant university and to the corresponding external assessment body.

The decision may be upheld or dismissed. The absence of an express decision within the aforementioned period shall allow the application to be considered as granted.

2.9. The university may lodge an appeal against this decision with the Presidency of the Consejo de Universidades within a maximum period of one month from the date of its notification. This procedure shall be carried out in accordance with the procedure established in sections 9 and following of Article 25 of Royal Decree 1393/2007, of 29 October.

2.10. In the event that the Consejo de Universidades issues a resolution of approval, the renewal of the centre's institutional accreditation will be entered in the Register of Universities, Centres and Programmes (RUCT).

All official degrees and master's degrees corresponding to the accredited centre, in accordance with the provisions of section 1) of the Resolution of 7 March 2018, of the General Secretariat for Universities, which lays down instructions on the procedure for institutional accreditation of public and private university centres, will incorporate as the date for renewal of accreditation at the RUCT the date corresponding to the resolution on renewal of institutional accreditation by the Consejo de Universidades. The same criteria will be applied to official university degree and master's degrees that are taught in several centres of the same university as well as, where appropriate, to joint degrees.

2.11. In the event that the Consejo de Universidades issues a rejection resolution, the university must apply for the renewal of the accreditation of all its official university degrees in accordance with the general procedure established in Article 27 bis of Royal Decree 1393/2007, of 29 October, within a period not exceeding one year from the date of the resolution.

2.12. The procedure for the institutional accreditation of the centres of the Universities of the Catholic Church established in Spain prior to the Agreement between the Spanish State and the Holy See on Teaching and Cultural Affairs, signed in Vatican City on 3 January 1979, shall be that established in this protocol, with the exception of the provisions of the fourth additional provision of Royal Decree 420/2015 of 29 May.

3. Evaluation criteria

In the process of preparing the evaluation reports, both the one corresponding to the self-assessment of the centre and the one issued by the corresponding external evaluation body, compliance with the Criteria and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) will be checked, taking as a reference the criteria established for the certification of the implementation of the IQAS, similar to those contemplated for the programmes renewal of accreditation.

CRITERIA (ESG)

- 1.1. Quality assurance policy
- 1.2. Programme design and approval
- 1.3. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment
- 1.4. Admission, progress, recognition and certification of students
- 1.5. Teaching staff
- 1.6 Resources for learning and student support
- 1.7. Information management
- 1.8. Public information
- 1.9. Continuous follow-up and periodic evaluation of programmes

Reference criteria (IQAS certification)

- I. Quality policy and objectives
- II. Quality assurance of training programmes
- III. Orientation of teaching to students
- IV. Ensuring and improving its academic and teaching support staff
- V. Guarantee and improvement of material resources and services
- VI. Analysis of the results of the training programmes
- VIII. Publication of information on the training programmes and activities of the centre
- VII. Analysis and use of the information generated about the centre's activities

The standards that specify the fulfilment of the evaluation criteria for the renewal of the institutional accreditation will in turn be aligned with the standards established for its referents in the certification of the implementation of the IQAS and in the renewal of programmes accreditation.

Similarly, the assessment levels of the criteria will be aligned with those established for their references.

4. Follow-up

Within the framework of their Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) implemented in the institutionally accredited university centres, the universities will carry out a monitoring of the institutional accreditation, focused on the fulfilment of the centre's objectives, its strategy of design and implementation of degrees, the development of the programmes of the centre, and the application of the IQAS to analyse and take decisions that ensure its results and its continuous improvement.

The external evaluation bodies responsible for the renewal of the institutional accreditation of the centres may, in agreement with the university, integrate external monitoring procedures that facilitate such renewal.