



Institutional Evaluation Policy for Universities and Polytechnic Schools in the Higher Education Quality Assurance System

**Institutional Evaluation Policy for Universities
and Polytechnic Schools in the Higher
Education Quality Assurance System**

August 2018

CACES

Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (Higher Education Quality Assurance Council)

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Institutional Evaluation Policy for Universities and Polytechnic Schools in the Higher Education Quality Assurance System

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Citation: CACES (2018). Institutional Evaluation Policy for Universities and Polytechnic Schools in the Higher Education Quality Assurance System, Quito: Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (Higher Education Quality Assurance Council)

CACES 2018

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Acknowledgements

This document was made up thanks to the contributions and meaningful participation of the members of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (CACES, for its initials in Spanish), its counselors and personnel from both technical and administrative areas. Their comments and suggestions allowed us to rethink and discuss the policy of institutional evaluation that is presented below.

We would like to especially thank our CACES colleagues who made a detailed review of this document: Diego Riascos for his collaboration in the writing of the text; Adriana Moreta, Cecilia Santana, Christian Escobar, Elizabeth Catagña, José Juan Silva, Katty Valencia, Marcela Serrador and María Auxiliadora Zambrano for their comments and proposals.

Presentation

After the comments made by the President of the Republic of Ecuador, Lic. Lenín Moreno Garcés, the National Assembly finally approved the Reform to the Organic Law of Higher Education published in the Official Registry No. 297, of August 2, 2018. This reform includes various concepts and contributions proposed in the course of the last months, as a result of the dialogue held between the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the organizations of the higher education system.

Today, the Reformatory Law is in force, consequently, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council in accordance with the new regulations is in a stage of constructive transition of exchange of arguments, which represents proposals for change and conceptual ruptures.

This new moment is based on a participatory self-reflection and self-assessment, which is based on the construction of the culture of quality by each HEIs. For this reason, dialectic with the academic community is an urgent need, so that the participation between CACES and the HEIs is a construction of assessment instruments resulting from agreements.

The CACES, based on the functions assigned by the new LOES, through its commissions is working in accordance to the Quality Assurance System. It must be considered that the first transitory provision of the Reform provides that the CACES prioritize the adequacy of the institutional evaluation model and, additionally, the Quality Assurance System. In the same way, the fourteen transitory provision establishes that, within eighteen months from August 2, 2018, the CACES must carry out the institutional evaluation of universities and polytechnic schools.

For that reason, this Council has defined a new: “POLICY OF INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND POLYTECHNICAL SCHOOLS IN

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SYSTEM OF ASSURING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION” as a result of several national and regional meetings, as of academic events celebrated within the last months of 2017 and the beginnings of 2018, the study of national publications, the participation in international seminars and of the systematization carried out by the Institutional Evaluation Commission.

This document makes an accurate historical and analytical account of the processes of evaluation of the quality of education since 1989 by the by the National Council of Universities and Polytechnic Schools (CONUEP, for its initials in Spanish), passing to 2002 and the work done by the National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEA, for its initials in Spanish), until the constitution of the Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CEAACES, for its initials in Spanish).

Subsequently, it is explained how quality assurance constitutes the central axis of the work done by the CACES, highlighting that the system is based on the permanent self-assessment to be developed by the HEIs, in accordance with the improvement and participation of all the institutions. In other words, quality assurance should not be understood as a further step towards evaluation and accreditation; on the contrary, it is the basis of the system that subsumes, incorporates and articulates the other components.

Therefore, that the quality principle is linked to the other principles that build up the Higher Education System and that looks for the equilibrium of the substantive functions such as: teaching, research and innovation, links with the society, institutional management, which is an important aspect of to the HEIs.

The document also addresses central axes of quality assurance such as: the centrality of self-assessment, the evaluation with and without accreditation purposes, the involvement of all the institutions in the quality assurance processes

and the intimate construction of the culture of quality in the higher education entities.

The biggest challenge in this new process that the CACES has -together with Higher Education Institutions- is to fulfil an ethical commitment to provide society with quality education, based on the democratization of access and equity, diversity, responsible autonomy, integrality, democracy, production of knowledge, the dialogue of knowledge and citizen values, as it is determined by the principle of quality in Art. 93 of the current LOES.



Gabriel Galarza López

President

Table of contents

Institutional Evaluation Policy for Universities and Polytechnic Schools in the Higher Education Quality Assurance

System.....	12
INTRODUCTION.....	12
I. BACKGROUND.....	14
CEAACES actions.....	17
A general perspective of higher education evaluation processes in Ecuador.....	24
II. QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A CENTRAL OBJECTIVE OF CACES.....	26
Where are we going and where have we been?.....	26
Principles of the Quality Assurance approach.....	31
Quality	37
III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM.....	40
The central lines of the quality assurance approach.....	45
The objective of the new approach.....	45
Central axes of the change of focus.....	46
1. Distinguish between evaluation with and without accreditation purposes.....	46
1.a. External evaluation without accreditation purposes (ESFA)	48
1.b. External evaluation for accreditation purposes (ECFA).....	50
The evaluation models.....	51
2. Give centrality to the institutional self-evaluation process.....	56
3. Substantial participation of HEIs in quality assurance processes.....	58
IV. THE IMMEDIATE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES.....	60
Bibliography references.....	63
Table of Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	66

List of Tables

Table 1. Processes of evaluation, accreditation and institutional academic categorization (2009-2017).....	16
Table 2. Processes of evaluation of extensions of Universities and Polytechnic Schools (2013-2017).....	17
Table 3. Processes for the evaluation of programs in Medicine, Dentistry, Law and Nursing (2014-2018).....	18
Table 4. Support processes for HEIs, extensions and programs (2015-2017).....	20
Table 5. Possible periods to conduct different types of evaluation.....	38

List of figures

Illustration 1. Historical milestones of the evaluation processes of universities and polytechnic schools.....	22
Illustration 2. Work outline of CEAACES 2011-2018.....	25
Illustration 3. Outline of the new work approach of CACES 2018.....	25
Illustration 4. System of Quality Assurance of Higher Education of Ecuador.....	35

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION POLICY FOR UNIVERSITIES AND POLYTECHNICAL SCHOOLS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM¹

INTRODUCTION

The Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CEAACES, for its initials in Spanish) has been responsible for evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance processes since its creation in 2011. These experiences have generated reflections and institutional learning to improve its processes and respond to the current needs of the country's higher education system (HES). Based on these lessons, this document presents a new approach to the institutional evaluation of universities and polytechnic schools within the framework of the Interinstitutional System of Quality Assurance (SIAC, for its initials in Spanish) conceived in the Reform to the Organic Law of Higher Education (LOR LOES, for its initials in Spanish) published in the Official Registry No. 297, of August 2, 2018.²

In the reformed law, quality assurance is no longer considered a process, as it was in the Organic Law of Higher Education of 2010 (LOES 2010), but a system in which various processes are articulated so that institutions within the HES work in an articulated manner for the continuous improvement of higher education quality. This document analyzes and supports changes inherent in this approach.

The document is organized in four parts. The first describes the background of the evaluation and accreditation of educational institutions in the country, including

¹The numbers of the articles of the Organic Law of Higher Education modified by the Reform to the Organic Law of Higher Education (LOR LOES) that appear in this document correspond to the text approved by the National Assembly and published in the Official Registry Supplement Year II- N. 297 of Thursday, August 2, 2018.

²It does not include elements referring to programmatic evaluation. The reference to institutes other than universities and polytechnic schools is tangential, since a specific document will be developed for these educational institutions.

the processes that CEAACES has carried out since its creation, to close with a general perspective of the trajectory of these processes and to characterize the current situation. The second part explores the significance of the creation of the SIAC and its framing principles. In the third section, the components of external and internal quality assurance that form part of the SIAC are analyzed, and the central lines of the new approach are presented: to distinguish between evaluation with and without accreditation purposes, to give centrality to institutional self-evaluation, and to achieve the active participation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the development of the new institutional evaluation policy.

This section includes some guidelines regarding the change of the institutional evaluation model for accreditation purposes, in accordance with the new policy. Finally, it presents immediate aspects that the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (CACES, for its initials in Spanish) must address, based on the dispositions emanating from the LOR LOES, approved in July 2018 by the National Assembly.

The first version of this document was circulated in May 2018 within CEAACES and was widely discussed by different bodies of the institution, in eleven working meetings held in May and June 2018. In these spaces the proposal was discussed, the participants made criticisms and suggestions to be included in the document; in addition, several officials made their individual comments related to the text. These proposals were systematized and included, as far as possible, in this final document.

I. BACKGROUND

In the countries of the region, quality assurance systems have been gaining strength since the late 1990s. In this context, governments of Latin American countries created institutions to carry out processes that guarantee the quality of higher education³ and promote the evaluation of HEIs and their programs, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of HEIs for their improvement.

In the case of Ecuador, the institutions in charge of evaluating, accrediting and promoting the quality of higher education have been public. The first institutional evaluation of universities and polytechnic schools was carried out in 1989 by the National Council of Universities and Polytechnic Schools (CONUEP, for its initials in Spanish). In this process, 21 universities (15 public and 6 private) were evaluated. One of the conclusions reached in this evaluation was that “in Ecuador there is no higher education system [...] in the strict sense. There is a set of university institutions that are independent from each other that, at the administrative level, have certain cooperation mechanisms [...]” (CONUEP 1992, 29).

Eleven years later, in the year 2000, the LOES was approved, in which a National System of Evaluation and Accreditation of Education was set up under the direction of the National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEA, for its initials in Spanish) (LOES 2000, Art. 90). In 2002, CONEA undertook the task of regulating and putting into operation processes of self-evaluation, external evaluation, and accreditation (Villavicencio 2008).

³The last report of the Interuniversity Center for Development (CINDA) shows the diversity of advances of the countries of the region in this matter and the countries are grouped according to the consolidation of their systems. Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama, Uruguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Spain and Portugal are in the group of countries with consolidated quality assurance systems; while Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela are placed in the group of countries with quality assurance systems in the initial phase and / or in restructuring (CINDA 2016).

Between 2002 and 2008, the institutional evaluation was carried out at the request of each HEI. Thus, by 2008, of 71 universities⁴, 18 had carried out a self-evaluation exercise and delivered a report. Of the total number of universities, 5 were accredited, 13 were in the process of external evaluation, 26 were in the process of self-evaluation, 11 were in the design stage of the self-evaluation project, 9 universities had not started the self-evaluation process, and 7 did not comply with the legal timeframe (Villavicencio 2008, 198). In the case of the Technical and Technological Institutes, only 15 of the 270 identified in that period conducted a self-evaluation, and only 1 completed the evaluation process, although it was not accredited (CONEA, 2007a, 2007b).

One of the difficulties faced in the 1989 evaluation and those between 2002 and 2008 was that “[...] certain sectors did not accept the resulting reports and made various arguments: that the evaluation did not work, that the methodology was inadequate, that there was no due process, in short, a whole set of problems that hinder the aforementioned attempt at accountability” (Pacheco 2010, 73). These difficulties diminished the legitimacy of these evaluation processes such that, despite their results, did not bring about major changes in the HES.

A milestone that marked significant changes in the country’s mechanisms for public guarantee of higher education quality was the approval by the National Constituent Assembly of Constitutional Mandate No. 14 in July 2008, which ordered CONEA to produce a technical report about the level of institutional performance of higher education establishments in Ecuador. The context of the higher education system in which this evaluation was ordered was the rapid growth of higher education institutions, with a majority being private universities that had proliferated since the nineties⁵.

⁴In 2008, according to data taken from the Higher Education Council, there were 73 universities, but 2 are not taken into account in these processes. The first case is that of Jefferson University, which was suspended by CONESUP in 2008, and the Federico Santa María Technical University, which is listed in the group of “foreign institutions that operate in Ecuador under inter-university agreements signed prior to the expedition of the Organic Law of Higher Education extended in 2010” (CES 2018).

In November 2009, CONEA presented to the National Assembly the report “Evaluation of institutional performance of the universities and polytechnic schools of Ecuador,” which revealed the situation and proposed radical solutions for better performance (CEAACES 2014). The orientation of this process was the “cleanup and improvement” of the higher education system and was legitimized by the Constituent Assembly. According to Sylva, this evaluation was different from previous evaluation processes, because it covered the entire universe of HEIs, did not include a self-evaluation process, and the recipients were the National Assembly and National Council of Higher Education (CONESUP, for its initials in Spanish), not the HEIs (Sylva 2010, 87). It was also a mandatory process. The results of this evaluation placed 11 universities in category A, 9 in category B, 13 in category C, 9 in category D, and 26 in category E (CEAACES 2014, 26)⁶.

The CONEA also evaluated 245 Technical and Technological Institutes and placed them into three categories of institutional performance (A, B and C). This evaluation had no impact on the suspension of these institutions (DEAIS-CEAACES 2015, 9).

Constitutional Mandate No. 14 began a change from the old to the new institutional framework of higher education in the country. With the approval of a new LOES in 2010, CEAACES was constituted to replace CONEA and assumed its functions in 2011. Since then, it has been responsible for driving the processes of evaluation, accreditation, and quality assurance of higher education.

⁵According to Lucas Pacheco, “While there were 21 university higher education institutions in 1989, in 2008 this figure reached 71 (Pacheco 2010, 61). From 1990, 50 universities were created, of which 34 were private. In addition, over the years mentioned, the extensions (branch campuses, satellite programs) grew from 35 to 142; academic units went from 192 to 360; researchers from 300 to 1,187; students from 186,618 to 465,000; instructors from 11,395 to 33,007; and, the number of administrative and service staff tripled in number, from 7,084 to 21,331 (Pacheco 2010, 63).

⁶In this process 68 of the 71 existing universities were evaluated. The postgraduate higher education institutions were not evaluated: National Institute of Higher Studies (IAEN), Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), and Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB).

CEAACES actions

The processes undertaken by CEAACES since 2011 were framed according to the functions assigned to this institution in the LOES 2010. The fundamental purpose of the processes is to guarantee the quality of higher education, with a focus on the cleanup and improvement of the system. To that extent, this institution has been in charge of planning, coordinating, and executing the activities of evaluation, accreditation, academic categorization, and quality assurance of institutions, programs, and institutes.

The following section describes the processes undertaken during these six years by CEAACES.

Regarding the processes of evaluation, accreditation, and academic categorization, one of the first tasks carried out by CEAACES was the evaluation of 26 category E universities⁷. The results of this evaluation placed 3 HEIs in the “Acceptable” group, 8 in the “Partially Acceptable” group, and the remaining 14 were classified as “Unacceptable”; on that basis the Higher Education Council (CES, for its initials in Spanish) ordered the suspension of these universities⁸. In 2013, CEAACES undertook a new process of evaluation, accreditation, and categorization of 54 universities and polytechnic schools⁹. As a result of this process, 46 universities were accredited, with 5 placed in category A, 23 in category B, and 18 in category C; 8 HEIs were placed in category D, that is, they were classified as “In Accreditation Process”¹⁰ (CEAACES 2014).

⁷In 2012, 25 universities in the “E” category were evaluated, and in 2013 the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University evaluation was carried out, thus completing the evaluation of 26 universities.

⁸See the CEAACES publication “Suspended due to lack of quality: The closing of fourteen universities in Ecuador.” Quito: CEAACES, 2013. It should be noted that, a year later, the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University was evaluated and was also suspended, but it was not closed as was done with the 14 “E” universities, which were included in the Law on Extinction of Universities issued by the National Assembly in 2016.

⁹This process was carried out in order to comply with the Twentieth Transitory Provision of the Constitution (2008) and the First Transitory Provision of the LOES, as five years had elapsed since the evaluation carried out by CONEA in 2009. In this process the Polytechnic Superior School of the Army (ESPE) and the Naval University Commander Rafael Morán Valverde did not participate, because they were in the process of merging.

¹⁰The institutions in category D had a two-year period to go through a new evaluation (CEAACES 2014b, 43).

In 2015 and 2016, voluntary recategorizations of 12 universities and polytechnic schools and the evaluation for accreditation purposes of the University of the Armed Forces (ESPE) were carried out. The results of this evaluation, in relation to the evaluation of 2013, allowed some HEIs to change their category: one university in category B was placed in category A; of the universities that were in category C, one university rose to category A, three universities passed to category B, while six universities remained in the same category and one university went to category D (DEI-CEAACES 2016). Between 2016 and 2017 the evaluation of the universities located in category D was carried out (UP-CEAACES 2018); of the 8 HEIs, 3 went to category B and 5 to category C. Table 1 summarizes the processes of institutional evaluation and their results.

Table 1. Processes of evaluation, accreditation and institutional academic categorization (2009-2017)

Year	Process	Total HEIs	Evaluated HEIs	Categories							
				Accredited			"E" HEIs Evaluation				
				A	B	C	D	E	Accepted	Partial Accepted	Not Accepted
2009	2009 CONEA Evaluation	71 ¹¹	68	11	9	13	9	26	-	-	-
2012	Evaluation Universities and Polytechnic Schools "E"	68	26	-	-	-	-	-	3	8	15
2013	Institutional Evaluation of Universities and Polytechnic Schools	55	54	5	23	18	8	-	-	-	-
2015 2016	Recategorization of Universities and Polytechnic Schools	59	12	2	3	7	-	-	-	-	-
	Mandatory evaluation ESPE		1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2016	2016 Evaluation Universities and Polytechnic Schools "D"		8	0	3	5	-	-	-	-	-
Total Accredited Universities and Polytechnic Schools (2018)		59 ¹²		8	28	19					
				55							

Sources: The evaluation of the quality of the Ecuadorian university. The experience of Mandate 14 (CEAACES 2014b); Report on the results of the process of evaluation, accreditation and recategorization of Universities and Polytechnic Schools (DEI-CEAACES 2016); Report CEAACES 2014; Report CEAACES 2015; Report CEAACES 2016.

¹¹This table does not take into account the Jefferson University and the Technical University Federico Santa María, for reasons discussed in a previous note.

¹²Currently in the higher education system there are 59 universities and polytechnic schools, of these 55 are accredited and the remaining 4 are the universities created in 2013 (Yachay, IKIAM, Uartes and UNAE).

In compliance with the Fifth Transitory Provision of the LOES, in 2013 CEAACES undertook a process of evaluation of the extensions—branch campuses and satellite programs—registered by the HEIs beyond its headquarters or main location. Under this provision, CEAACES evaluated 86 extensions. The results identified four groups according to their performance in the evaluation: 2 were “Approved,” 21 were approved “With conditions,” 19 “With strong conditions,” and 44 “Not Approved,” with the latter prohibited from enrolling new students (CEAACES 2014). Among those 37 extensions “With conditions” and “With strong conditions,” 37 accepted the improvement plan, and in 2015 a new evaluation was carried out; as a result of this process, 31 extensions obtained the category of “Approved” and 6 were “Not Approved” (CEAACES 2015, 18). The latter could take part in an emergency plan and then be evaluated again. Under this same premise, in 2017 the evaluation of 6 extensions “With strong conditions” was carried out and all were approved (UP-CEAACES 2018). Table 2 summarizes the information of the evaluations of extensions that have been conducted.

Table 2. Processes of evaluation of extensions of Universities and Polytechnic Schools (2013-2017)

Year	Total Extensions	Process	Evaluated Extensions	Categories			
				Approved	Conditioned	Strongly Conditioned	Not Approved
2013	86	Evaluation of extensions	86	2	21	19	44
2015	42	Evaluation of "Conditioned" and "Strongly Conditioned" extensions	37 ¹³	31	-	6	-
2017	39	Evaluation of extensions "Strongly Conditioned"	6	6	-	-	-
Total Approved Extensions (2018)				39			

Sources: The evaluation of the quality of the Ecuadorian university. The experience of Mandate 14 (CEAACES 2014); Accountability CEAACES 2015; Working document: Institutional Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (UP-CEAACES 2018).

¹³Of the 40 extensions in the process of accreditation, in 2015 only 37 were accepted for the evaluation.

Regarding the programmatic evaluation processes, these have included two fundamental components: the evaluation of the learning environment and the evaluation of learning outcomes, as established by the LOES before its reform in 2018 (Articles 94, 95, 103, and 104). The first programs to be evaluated were those recognized as “public interest programs,” according to the definition made by the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT, for its initials in Spanish) and based on the resolutions adopted by the CEAACES Plenary (CEAACES 2014a). In this sense, between 2014 and 2015, 22 Medicine programs were evaluated, of which 10 were “Accredited” and 12 were designated “In Accreditation Process”¹⁴. Between 2015 and 2016 15 programs in Dentistry were evaluated; the results of this process were 10 “Accredited” and 5 “In Accreditation Process.” The evaluation of 51 Law programs began in 2016 with the evaluation of the learning environment, and in 2018 the National Examination of Program Evaluation (ENEC, for its initials in Spanish) was administered. In 2017 the evaluation of the learning environment of 25 Nursing programs was carried out, and in 2018 the ENEC of the aforementioned programs took place. Table 3 shows the results of the career evaluation processes.

Table 3. Processes for the evaluation of programs in Medicine, Dentistry, Law and Nursing (2014-2018)

Year	Process	Total careers	Evaluated careers	Processes carried out		Categories	
				E. Learning environment	E. Learning outcomes	Accredited	In process of Accreditation
2014 2015	Medical careers evaluation	22	22	✓	✓	10	12
2015 2016	Dentistry careers evaluation	15	15	✓	✓	10	5
2016 2018	Law Careers evaluation	51	49 ¹⁵	✓	✓	19	26 ¹⁶
2017 2018	Nursing careers evaluation	25	25	✓	✓	16	9 ¹⁷
Total careers (2018)		113	111			55	52

Sources: Report CEAACES 2014; Report CEAACES 2015; Report CEAACES 2016; Information provided by the Direction of Evaluation and Accreditation of Universities and Polytechnic Schools.

Additionally, according to the structure established by CEAACES, the processes designated as quality assurance have implied a phase subsequent to the processes of external evaluation, accreditation, and categorization. The main objective of these processes has been to promote quality improvement in those HEIs not accredited. In keeping with this purpose, technical instruments were developed with guidelines for the creation of improvement proposals¹⁸; HEIs were accompanied in developing improvement plans, institutional enhancement plans, and quality assurance plans, whose names differed according to the categorization obtained by the HEIs in relation to accreditation; HEIs were monitored by means of the review of reports on plan implementation and on-site visits. In 2016, assistance was also provided for self-evaluation processes of universities and polytechnic schools. Table 4 shows the support processes carried out between 2015 and 2017.

The Qualifying Examination for Professional Practice (EHEP, for its initials in Spanish) is another activity of quality assurance processes, and it seeks to ensure that the public can count on professionals who have the necessary knowledge and skills in their field and are thus able to practice their profession with quality (CEAACES 2016). The LOES 2010 and its reforms of 2018 establish that said examination will be administered in programs that affect the public good, in which the life, health, or safety of the public could be at risk. Under these premises, between 2014 and 2018 the EHEP has been administered on nine occasions for students of Medicine, seven times for students of Dentistry, and twice for Nursing students.

This account of the processes carried out by CEAACES demonstrates the transformation that the higher education system has undergone over the last ten years. Compared to the 71 universities and polytechnic schools that existed in 2009, 59 HEIs now form part of the system, of which 55 are accredited and the remaining 4 are those created after the approval of the LOES 2010. As for extensions, through the cleanup and improvement of quality, that number was

reduced by more than half, as it went from 86 in 2013 to 39 today, all of which are “Approved.” The programmatic evaluation processes, especially those characterized as for the public good, have also been relevant: out of a total of 111 programs evaluated, 55 have been accredited.

As mentioned above, after the evaluation processes for accreditation purposes, activities have been carried out to monitor and accompany unaccredited HEIs, with the aim of supporting them in overcoming weaknesses so that they complete new accreditation processes with better results. This structure has responded to a linear logic, in which quality assurance has been a process subsequent to accreditation and categorization.

¹⁴These programs had to present an enhancement plan to be carried out over a period of one or two years, according to CEAACES regulations, in order to comply with the minimum standards of the evaluation of the learning environment (CEAACES, 2015).

¹⁵Of the 51 Law programs, so far the results reflect the evaluation of 49, since 2 have not yet presented the ENEC.

¹⁶The remaining 4 programs in this process await a resolution regarding their status after the evaluation.

¹⁷The data for “Accredited programs” and “In process of accreditation” in Nursing correspond to the resolution by the Commission of Evaluation of Careers in 2018. This resolution will pass to the Plenary of the Council later.

¹⁸Instructions for the construction of plans, multipurpose guidelines for institutional and programmatic self-evaluation processes, among others.

Table 4. Support processes for HEIs, extensions and programs (2015-2017)

Year	HEIs and careers	Accompaniment		
		Follow-up to improvement plans, institutional strengthening plans and quality assurance plans.		Self-evaluation
		Documentary monitoring	On-site monitoring	
2014	54 Universities and polytechnic schools	Compliance with improvement plans (HEIs category A, B, C) and institutional strengthening (HEIs category D).	24 universities and polytechnic schools visited to know the progress of the activities contemplated in improvement and strengthening plans.	-
2015	12 Medicine careers «In Accreditation Process»	Review of strengthening plans and issuance of reports with observations and recommendations.	-	-
	37 extensions "Conditioned" and "Strongly conditioned" evaluated in 2013	Verification of compliance with the improvement plan to be executed in eighteen months after the evaluation.	-	-
	6 extensions «Strongly conditioned»	Review and approval of emerging plans ¹⁹ to be executed in six months.	-	-
	39 "Not Approved" extensions	Review and approval of quality assurance plans ²⁰ for 36 extensions.	On-site visits to the extensions to verify compliance with their quality assurance plans.	-
2016	15 universities and polytechnic schools	-	-	On-site monitoring of the self-assessment processes
	5 Dentistry careers «In Accreditation Process»	Review of strengthening plans and issuance of reports with observations and recommendations	-	-
2017	9 Medicine careers «In Accreditation Process»	-	-	On-site support to self-assessment processes, as part of monitoring compliance with strengthening plans
	14 Dentistry careers	Review of strengthening plans and issuance of reports with observations and recommendations	-	-

Source: Report CEAACES 2015; Report CEAACES 2016; Information provided by the Quality Assurance Directorate - CEAACES, 2018.

¹⁹This plan is focused on defining immediate improvement actions to reach the minimum standards for institutional evaluation (CEAACES 2016).

²⁰The purpose of quality assurance plans is to ensure that students complete their professional program under adequate conditions.

This structure changes substantially with the approval of the Reform to the LOES of 2018, due to the fact that the Interinstitutional System of Quality Assurance is established (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 69), and quality assurance becomes a central and permanent process, based primarily on the self-evaluation of HEIs as well as external evaluation processes.

A general perspective of higher education evaluation processes in Ecuador

A brief historical account allows identification of four phases in the evaluation of Quality of higher education in Ecuador. The first, in which the quality evaluation is little recognized, occurred between 1989 and 2008, in a context of proliferation of private universities and the decline of public institutions, due to budgetary restrictions of the neoliberal economic model and damaging partisan mismanagement. During this period, the main actors of the higher education institutions showed limited interest in transforming the situation and, therefore, the evaluation processes were mostly unwelcome.

The instability of teaching, the laxness and even the commercialization of university degrees, the lack of minimal conditions and infrastructure for teaching, among others, had led to a kind of academic fraud that was corroding the university, cheating students and injuring the entire society. It was essential to effect an evaluation of the universities to allow identification of this group of institutions, whose closing society required. (Villavicencio 2017, 151)

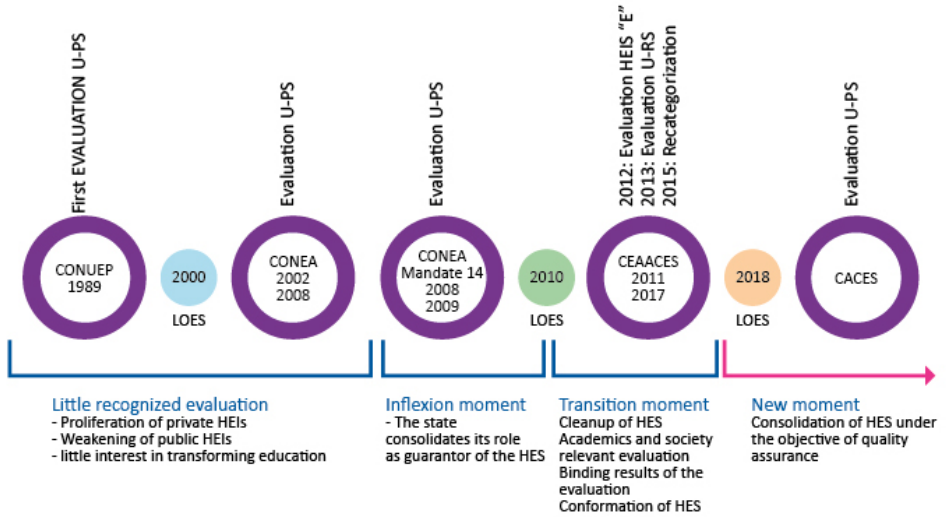
A second phase, which can be defined as a point of inflection, begins with Constitutional Mandate No. 14, which sought mainly to clean up the HES. This process implied a crucial shift, since the state consolidated its role as guarantor of higher education quality. The regulations and institutions created after 2008 contributed to shaping the higher education system.

The approval of the LOES 2010 initiates the third phase, which could be described as a transition towards the institutionalization of procedures for evaluating the quality of higher education. Between 2010 and 2017 several evaluation processes, accreditation, academic categorization, and quality assurance of HEIs and their programs took place, and their results straddle the cleanup of the system, as can be seen in the statement quoted above, and the goal of improving the quality of the system. The evaluation processes carried out by CEAACES, as public policy, were seen as legitimate by the academy and by society; the results of these evaluations were, for the first time, binding and served to make decisions regarding the HES.

Ecuador now has 55 accredited universities and polytechnic schools²¹ that, notwithstanding their opportunities for improvement, meet the minimum requirements for operation; several of them exceed these basic conditions and have distinctive strengths, and it is incumbent on all of them to participate in the process of continuous improvement, in a new phase characterized by the creation of an Interinstitutional System for Quality Assurance, endorsed by the Reform to the LOES, approved in July 2018 by the National Assembly.

²¹Four universities created after the approval of the LOES have not yet been evaluated: UNAE, IKIAM, UARTES and YACHAY..

Figure 1. Historical milestones of the evaluation processes of universities and polytechnic schools



II. QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A CENTRAL OBJECTIVE OF CACES

Where are we going and where have we been?

The reform carried out to the LOES in 2018 creates the Interinstitutional System for Quality Assurance (SIAC), whose main actors are CES, CACES and the higher education institutions (Article 94) themselves.

The first part of the definition of the SIAC highlights the need for an articulated operation of public agencies and higher education institutions with the objective of quality assurance, assigning to CACES the function of planning and coordinating the functions of the SIAC.

The LOR LOES establishes that:

This system will be based mainly on the permanent self-evaluation that higher education institutions conduct on fulfillment of their purposes.

The Higher Education Quality Assurance Council will accredit higher education institutions and programs in accordance with the provisions of this Law and the Regulations issued for that purpose. (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 94)

This second part of the definition of the SIAC indicates the necessary articulation of self-evaluation and accreditation, as two processes that contribute to continuous improvement, emphasizing the centrality of self-evaluation.

The main differences of this approach with the one proposed in the LOES 2010, before its 2018 reforms, is that it established under title V (Quality of higher education) and the first chapter (Of the principle of quality) four processes: the evaluation of quality, accreditation, quality assurance and categorization (LOES 2010, Art. 94-97). Quality assurance was defined in relation to the “efficient and effective management” of higher education institutions.

CEAACES did not clearly define what it understood as quality assurance. The Organic Statute of Process Management of CEAACES, for example, states that “quality assurance of higher education in Ecuador” is carried out through the processes of evaluation, accreditation, and categorization. This statement implied an idea of quality assurance that privileged procedures linked to verifying compliance with minimum standards and criteria, in order to grant a certificate that guarantee to the public the quality of HEIs. According to the literature on quality assurance, the above corresponds only to the purposes of control and guarantee (Lemaitre and Mena 2012), while the components of quality have the

aim of encouraging internal institutional improvement processes.

In the institutional mission, quality assurance of was assumed as a purpose—although without defining it—while in the name of the institution this was only a process, on the same level as evaluation and accreditation, and to be effected after these. As the acronym CEAACES suggests, first is evaluation, then accreditation, and finally quality assurance. This sequence determined the creation of an Office of Quality Assurance in charge of accompaniment activities, which were implemented following the processes of external evaluation and accreditation (CAC-CEAACES 2018).

In this idea of quality assurance, self-evaluation had a secondary role, subsumed as it was as a mere requirement of external evaluation, which was more important, thus the spirit of self-reflection of this process was lost. As for the evaluation, HEIs were prepared to “reach” a required score to be accredited, prioritizing aspects according to the evaluation model and not necessarily institutional needs, which caused distortions in some cases. According to this logic, the evaluation model became a rigid framework for thinking about the endeavors of the university.

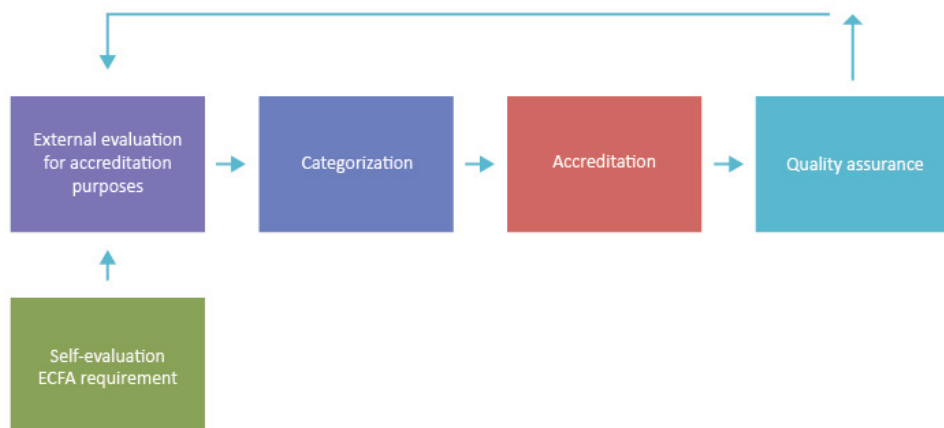
Meanwhile, the categorization on the basis of the score obtained in the external evaluation ordered the HEIs vertically, generating a system based on competition, and caused the social effect of a loss of prestige for some HEIs and therefore difficulties for their students in the labor market.

In this conception of evaluation and categorization, quality assurance was considered a later process to be carried out with HEIs that presented the most serious weaknesses. For CEAACES, ensuring quality involved following up these HEIs through monitoring improvement plans, institutional enhancement plans and quality assurance plans, which instead of strengthening key aspects of institutional planning, focused on raising scores based on the evaluation and accreditation model. The different names given to the same type of plans varied by

the different categorization of the HEIs and the time granted to them to repeat the evaluation for accreditation purposes. It is paradoxical, to say the least, to call the “quality assurance plan” the one that had to be carried out by the HEIs that would close due to not achieving the minimum necessary for accreditation but which had to guarantee basic conditions so their remaining students could graduate. This description shows that what was understood as quality assurance began three years after CEAACES was created, there was little clarity in its conceptualization, and it was implicitly or explicitly an underappreciated process²².

The enormous work done by the Office of Quality Assurance—as detailed in Table 4—was to accompany the HEIs in processes that had the ultimate objective of accreditation. That is to say, the accompaniment sought to “train” those HEIs with the most serious weaknesses, based on the evaluation model, to subsequently be accredited. Even the two accompanying self-evaluation processes that are reported, are embedded in imminent processes of accreditation and recategorization.

Figure 2. Work outline of CEAACES 2011-2018



²²No written evidence has been found of discussions, if any, having taken place on approaches that support the processes that CEAACES has been carrying out, which makes it difficult to critically highlight the underlying ideas about the institutional action taken.

In the reforms made to the LOES in 2018, the processes of self-evaluation, external evaluation and accreditation are part of quality assurance, conferring on this concept the importance of articulating an integrated system between state institutions and HEIs. Categorization is eliminated and the self-evaluation process assumes relevance as the core of the quality assurance system, while the LOES 2010, before its reform in 2018, subsumed it in the accreditation process. Figure 3 illustrates the new phase marked by quality assurance of as the central objective and no longer as a process.

Figure 3. Outline of the new work approach of CACES 2018



This agrees with the description by Espinoza Díaz of a system of quality assurance that:

[...] involves the collaborative and permanent action carried out by the State and the higher education institutions themselves, aimed at achieving a harmonious optimal development of the system and of each of the institutions it comprises, in order to achieve adequate compliance with the mission that society has entrusted to them [...] Through quality assurance the aim is to adequately meet the needs of the country, be more efficient in the use of available resources and deliver satisfactory service, providing guarantees to all citizens (Espinoza Díaz 2015, 9, cited in DEI-CEAACES 2018, 3).

The actions of the state and HEIs should complement each other, unifying to develop a critical awareness and willingness to consider the performance of higher education in the country and gradually consolidate a culture of quality.

Principles of the Quality Assurance System

What type of quality is it that the Interinstitutional System of Quality Assurance will ensure? The meaning of quality is determined by the social and political context of the actors involved in its construction. In this way, when talking about quality, its content cannot be assumed as a neutral or universal value, because it is an academic and political position that encloses a particular vision of higher education and the reality in which it is inserted²³.

²³Academic and political stance refer to the philosophical and critical content that sustains—or should support—the existence of the university in society. Derrida correctly says, “This university without condition does not exist, in fact, as we know too well. But, in principle and in accordance with its declared vocation, by virtue of its professed essence, it should remain the last place of critical resistance-and more than criticism-against all dogmatic and unjust appropriation powers” (Derrida 2002, 12).

To begin with, quality is not instrumental. As a principle, it is linked to other principles with which it is articulated, on which it depends and to which it contributes. Strictly speaking, ensuring the quality of higher education is to ensure that HEIs comply in the best possible way with their substantive functions within the framework of the principles of higher education²⁴.

A first basic principle is to conceive of higher education as a right and a public good²⁵. While not all citizens wish to access higher education as a life option, considering it a right supposes that HEIs and the HES together must guarantee equal opportunity for access, continuation, and completion opportunities to all those who opt for it. Thus, the differences of socio-economic, ethnic, gender, age, sexual preference, disability, residency, political or religious beliefs, or mobility status/cannot be obstacles to exercising that right. In today's unequal societies, all actors within the HES must implement effective measures to eliminate barriers that persist in the access, continuation, and completion of higher education to those citizens who wish to enter the HES.

The production and transmission of knowledge, in the era of globalization and in the current knowledge society, face strong pressures to serve commercial interests, especially through research and innovation. However, to think of higher education as a public social good is to state emphatically that it cannot be commercialized or become a profitable "service." The LOES, before and after its reform of 2018, ratifies this by stating that higher education "will respond to the public interest and will not be at the service of individual and corporate interests" (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 3).

²⁴The concept of quality in higher education is developed further ahead.

²⁵This is established by the LOES and also by the Declaration approved by the recent Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES 2018), held in the city of Córdoba, Argentina.

Responding to the “public interest” means for HEIs “to provide a space in which members of society can reflect from different perspectives on what society is doing, can seek explanations and debate natural and social phenomena without reference to external constraints and directed objectives” (Villavicencio 2017a, 270). The latter intersects with the principle of autonomy, which assumes that HEIs can develop their critical and proactive role without limits imposed by governments, creeds, market demands or individual interests (CRES 2018).

It must be borne in mind that Latin American universities, especially public ones, “have played a key role in the construction of State institutions, in the solution of pressing problems in their countries and, in general, in the provision of a broad range of community services and in the creation and recreation of national cultures” (Villavicencio 2017b, 141), which characterizes for the region, the sense that higher education is a “public good.”

For higher education to be a “public good,” it is necessary, on the other hand, to direct the substantive functions of HEIs according to the needs of the societies that inhabit their environments and, at this point, is the intersection with the principle of relevance. According to the LOR LOES 2018:

The principle of relevance consists of how higher education responds to the expectations and needs of society, to national planning, and to the development regime, to the global prospective of scientific, humanistic and technological development, and to cultural diversity. To this end, higher education institutions will articulate their teaching, research and engagement with society to the demand for academic programs; to the need for local, regional, and national development; to innovation and diversification of professions and academic degrees; to local, regional, and national employment trends; to local, provincial, and regional demographic trends; to current and potential productive structure of the province and the

region; and to the national policies of science and technology” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 170).

This relevance refers to the type of relationship that universities and polytechnic schools (UEP, for their initials in Spanish) have with the societies in which they are inserted. This relationship shapes the way in which each HEI develops its three core functions, but it is usually made visible through actions and structures for engagement with society. With respect to this, Cielo and Pérez Martínez argue that the definition of “relevance” of the Ecuadorian LOES, is part of a type of link “in pursuit of development in which the expert university responds to social needs by promoting productivity.” Two other forms of relationship between Ecuadorian HEIs and their environment, according to these authors, are “through the extension of a humanistic university that contributes to the public good with service and outreach activities” and / or to “collaborate in the transformation carried out by the university participating in dialogical and epistemological-political processes for the constitution of society” (Cielo and Pérez Martínez 2017, 197).

In Latin America there are a series of embedded expectations about higher education that come from society, the state, the productive sectors, the education system and other social actors. All these interests mean that higher education has an increasingly broad—and often contradictory—social mandate that demands, at each step, a self-reflective scrutiny of the relevance of the higher education offered and the type of relevance at which it aims. All these concepts are not static but rather in constant redefinition. Societies are not actualities in which education acts in a neutral manner, but are full of contradictions of all kinds, against which, HEIs position themselves at every step, expressly or tacitly. In order for Ecuadorian higher education to respond within the framework of the principles adopted as common, UEPs must exercise social responsibility, understood not from the corporate vision that has coined that concept, but as relevance and social commitment (Tunnermann 2009, cited by Van der Bijl 2017).

The institutions that regulate higher education must subject their actions to these principles and the other actors that form part of the HES have a collective responsibility to maintain the validity of the public interest in higher education. This means that higher education institutions, regardless of their public or private nature, are responsible for observing these principles as a guideline for action.

The System of Higher Education of Ecuador is part of the National System of Inclusion and Social Equity, established in the Constitution of the Republic, so it is governed by principles of “universality, equality, equity, progressivity, interculturality, solidarity and non-discrimination” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 12). These principles are valid not only for Ecuador but are shared worldwide, as most countries signed the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, with the fourth being “To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations 2015). These characteristics define the type of higher education that the country and the world want and should serve as guidelines for the organization of the SIAC.

Equity is not the same as equality, which is related to the identical treatment among people who make up a society. Equity refers to the recognition of differences between people and the need to give differentiated treatment to overcome inequality gaps generated on the basis of differences. It requires educational institutions that are sensitive to diversity and the particular needs of students and the educational community in general, because educational spaces are not made up of homogeneous populations but of people with different abilities, needs and identities, which require attention that corresponds to that diversity. This demands a moral and ethical commitment from higher education institutions so that personal circumstances of any kind do not affect people’s educational opportunities.

Equity and inclusion are articulated to the notion of higher education as a public good and as a right, because as international organizations such as the United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) point out, education is essential to close social, economic and cultural gaps within the country and between countries. Education is only a right when it is guaranteed for all those who choose to develop in the higher education system, without any discrimination and when there is a public obligation to protect, respect and fulfill this right.

The LOES synthesizes the principles that govern the higher education system with the following:

[...] responsible autonomy, shared governance, equality of opportunities, quality, relevance, integrality, self-determination for the production of thought and knowledge, within the framework of the dialogue of knowledge, universal thought and global scientific and technological production. (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 12)

Several of these have already been referenced, and their intrinsic articulation demonstrated. Why shared governance? In order to train critical thinkers able to analyze the problems of society and find solutions for the country, capable of thinking and explaining the phenomena of reality, it is not possible to achieve this without being protagonists of their own formation. The participation and commitment in the decision-making of the UEPs, apart from being a democratic right, prepares them in that orientation, enables them to assume responsibilities and challenges. The principle of integrality follows the same logic. If the substantive functions of higher education are dissociated and disarticulated, critical and well-trained professionals will not come from the UEPs and, therefore, quality will be far from achieved. If, on the other hand, the education system as a whole—basic education, baccalaureate and higher—does not act in an articulate manner, neither can a sustainable and progressive improvement in the quality of education be achieved, guaranteeing present and future generations the right to education.

The basic principles of higher education, as a whole, are framed within the horizon of universal thought from throughout history and of the dialogue of knowledge and global scientific and technological understandings, as is also recognized in the reforms to the LOES of 2018, given that it is the only way to form people who are historically situated with open mindsets and capacity for lifelong learning.

Quality

When defining the principle of quality, the LOR LOES precisely inserts it and relates it to the aforementioned principles. Moreover, it considers that it is based

on the balance of teaching, research and innovation, and engagement with society, guided by relevance, inclusion, the democratization of access and equity, diversity, responsible autonomy, integrality, democracy, production of knowledge, the dialogue of knowledge, and citizenship. (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 93)

The anchoring of quality with principles like these and with the understanding of education as a public good and its characterization as a “principle”, is an antidote against merely operational visions of quality, which are generally unclear. “The literature indicates that the concept of quality in higher education was extrapolated from the industrial field where it refers to the production of goods and services” (DEI-CEAACES 2016a, 2). It was in the 1990s, within the framework of global neoliberal ideological hegemony, that discussions began regarding the relevance of using the notion of quality in the field of higher education; nevertheless, it can be said that even today such discussions continue, and have become more heated, making the polysemy of the concept only greater.

The World Conferences on Higher Education, promoted by UNESCO, initially considered the concept as problematic because of its business origin, which

contradicted the vision of higher education as a public good, which had been adopted in 1998. In subsequent years, the statements of the UNESCO welcomed the need for national quality assessment systems in higher education until, recently, they include the quality discussion agenda as part of the conception of education as a social public good, universal human right and responsibility of the state (DEI -CEAACES 2016a).

The most widespread meanings of the concept of quality have been those of excellence, perfection, adaptation or adjustment to the purposes, value for money (cost-benefit) and transformation (Harvey 1998). The previous LOES, for example, placed “excellence” as the first reference of quality:

The principle of quality consists in the constant and systematic search for excellence, relevance, optimal production, transmission of knowledge and development of thought through self-criticism, external criticism and permanent improvement. (LOES 2010, Art. 93)

Excellence tends to be equated with exceptionality (professors, students, researchers, libraries, laboratories, exceptional resources), with which the concept shifts to an elitist vision of higher education, which assumes that with excellent inputs one obtains—directly—excellent results. In contrast, the vision of quality as transformation is rooted in the notion of qualitative change, the passage from one state to another. It focuses on the students, who are the reason for being of the HEIs although this is often forgotten; and its purpose is to improve their conditions and deepen their reflective and critical sense throughout their lives (Harvey 1998).

Education, in this perspective, is a participatory process:

Students are not products, customers or consumers. They are participants.
Education is not a service for a client (much less a product to be consumed)

but a continuous process of transformation of the participant. (Harvey 1998, 244)²⁶

Focusing exclusively on the operationalization of ways to measure the quality of higher education, eluding a deeper look at the underlying conceptual meanings, brings as a consequence several biases that undermine the fundamental reasons for higher education, and the principles that the Ecuadorian legislation itself embraces. It confuses, for example, the means (inputs) with the purposes; it injects a notion of competition (between students, between HEIs) which distorts the educational process, which must be essentially collaborative in order to build academic and learning communities. The notion of “excellence” in particular, which has been the main reference for the educational quality in Ecuador, supposes a comparative requirement, that for some to be excellent others must not be. Thus, the horizon of “excellence,” far from being an ideal for the whole system, becomes a source of separation and elitism.

In Ecuador, the categorization of UEPs clearly expressed this conception²⁷ and led to distortions, not only in inducing competition among institutions, but in the distribution of public resources for higher education, when institutions that suffer from lack of quality problems are precisely those that require more resources to be able to improve. In the debate over the new LOES, it was stated, on the contrary, that “quality indicators for distribution purposes should focus on the level of improvement, evaluating the current results of the institution with respect to itself in past periods and not/comparing it only with other institutions, whose evolution and contexts are different” (National Assembly of Ecuador 2018, 32).

A still more problematic bias is that which establishes the parameters for quality comparison only with the countries of the Northern hemisphere, with which “excellence” leads to the copying and uncritical adoption of indicators that come from countries (and from companies in those countries) that seek, through their

²⁷The categorization of IES has been eliminated in the LOR LOES 2018.

rankings, to perpetuate international asymmetry of knowledge, and continue to dominate the circuits of scientific and technological exchange (Van der Bijl 2017, Villavicencio 2017a and 2017b).

Another thing is to suggest, instead of the competition among HEIs, the emulation of more integral and integrative parameters of its core functions; or to propose, instead of uncritical acceptance of homogenizing rankings, an international openness towards the world's educational communities, within the framework “of the dialogue of knowledge and of global scientific and technological understandings” (LOR LOES 2018), out of a need to generate relevant knowledge for their realities.

CACES has great responsibility in the planning and coordination of the Inter-institutional Quality Assurance System, because what is evaluated becomes parameters that tend to push the higher education system to align with certain paradigms. That is why it is necessary to make them explicit, to question them as may be the case, but not to commit two common mistakes: on the one hand, to accept as givens (in our own practice, in other countries or in the world) as appropriate per se, generally what is known is the dominant current (the mainstream) that responds to very precise and powerful interests and, therefore, is not neutral. And, on the other hand, to conceive of the evaluation as merely a “technical” process, stripped of values and philosophical and political conceptions.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM²⁸

In the previous section it has already been argued that quality assurance is understood as the search for qualitative change in higher education institutions, based on a permanent self-reflection of the educational communities as a whole,

²⁸This part is based on the document of the DEI-CEAACES 2018

aimed at the continuous improvement of its three substantive functions: teaching, research and engagement with society.

The fundamental purpose of quality assurance is to ensure that higher education institutions assume the responsibility of promoting their development and ensuring quality, without external constraints (Kells, Massen & de Haan 1992, Kells 1995, Lemaitre & Mena 2012). It is about moving from a situation where the search for quality is seen as an obligation, to another where the promotion of its development is a habit (Lemaitre and Mena 2012).

The roles of the state and HEIs are different and that is why an external quality assurance system and an internal quality assurance system are established within the SIAC. Both must be geared organically to have higher education quality as a permanent objective, taking into account that the relationship between the two systems is necessary, since every evaluation process demands the other to be effective and not self-fulfilling²⁹.

Therefore, the relationship between internal and external insurance should not be based on distance (external audit vs. internal self-assessment) but on the search for constant articulation, which is defined by the different functions of each process carried out by the responsible parties, and not for differences in the spirit of contributing to the improvement of quality, since this must be common. The fundamental axis of this relationship is structured in the role and contribution of the peers in both assurance processes, who guarantee a relationship of externality and, at the same time, of horizontality, given the academic origin of their function.

²⁹This assertion is valid both in relation to the performance of HEIs that are evaluated externally by CACES, to avoid their complacency, and for the assessment made by HEIs of their own performance and results of the evaluation processes promoted by CACES, to ensure self-critical visions of what the work entails. That is, the condition of otherness is reciprocally necessary.

The quality assurance system (external and internal) includes the articulation of three purposes and their processes: licensing, authorization or regulation; the public guarantee of quality; and continuous improvement.

- The purpose of the '*licensing or regulation*' is to determine if the HEIs and their academic programs comply with a defined quality framework. It functions through the authorization for higher education institutions to operate, based on verification of compliance with minimum quality standards or criteria. This ensures that within the system only institutions that meet the basic conditions can operate and, reciprocally, gives legitimacy to institutions that meet the established criteria (Salazar 2012).

In Ecuador, this license is granted by the Higher Education Council that has the authority and duty to create, intervene, suspend, close or extinguish HEIs, with the support of reports made by CACES and the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES for its initials in Spanish) (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 169, literal b, c, e, f; Art. 174, literals o, p, r).

- The public guarantee of quality is the certification granted by the State to society regarding the degree to which the higher education system satisfies institutional purposes, standards and quality criteria (Salazar 2012).

Through this guarantee, the state informs society if HEIs preserve, develop and strengthen the necessary conditions to adequately train professionals and scholars in those fields of knowledge, disciplines and sciences that allow for the enhancement of Ecuadorian and other human talent; to produce pertinent knowledge and put this at the service of the country's development, taking into account the institutional purposes declared by HEIs (institutional missions).

The procedure for giving this guarantee is accreditation, which is based on evaluation for accreditation purposes. In Ecuador, and in the case of programs, accreditation is complemented by the evaluation of learning outcomes of programs³⁰ /The absolute responsibility for quality assurance, through the accreditation process, is the responsibility of the Council for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CACES) (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 173 and 174, literal c, d, f, g).³¹/

- The continuous improvement of quality is a main function and responsibility of higher education institutions, based on self-regulation, understood as the capacity of an entity to guide its behavior based on voluntary monitoring and control derived from the understanding that the aim of and search for quality is a primary responsibility of the HEIs themselves (Kells 1995).

The internal assurance of quality is defined in the LOR LOES 2018 as

A set of actions carried out by higher education institutions, in order to develop and apply effective policies to promote the constant development of the quality of academic programs in coordination with other actors of the Higher Education System. (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 96)

The continuous improvement of quality in HEIs tends to forge a culture of quality, that is, a way of being of the community of the university and technical / technological institute, a habitual way of proceeding oriented towards quality by the different levels it comprises: authorities, faculty, students, and administrative staff.

³⁰According to the LOES 2018 'an exam or other evaluation mechanisms for students in the last academic period' will be determined for this evaluation of learning outcomes. CACES in coordination with SENESCYT will determine what careers will present this evaluation of learning outcomes (LOES 2018, Art.103).

³¹Oddy, in the LOES 2010, before its reform in 2018, self-evaluation a not accreditation was involved in the "Standarts for Quality assurance" chapter (LOES 2010, Art. 98 and 99).

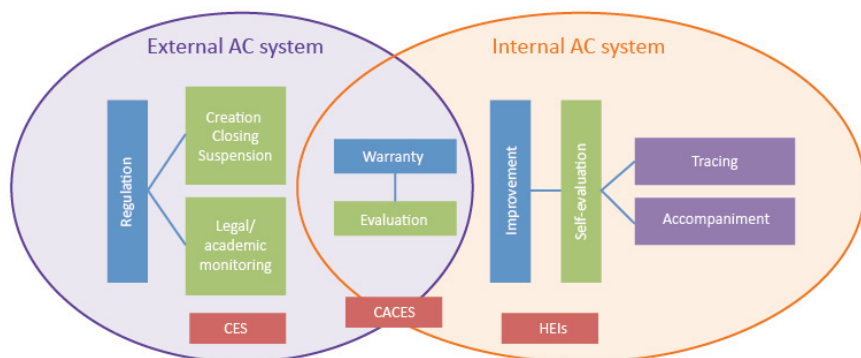
The effort of continuous improvement must be supported by the state, in particular by the public bodies of the National System of Higher Education and especially by those that make up the SIAC, from their own spheres. Higher education institutions of the State, CES, CACES and the governing body of public policy (LOES 2018), based on their own roles and areas of action, should ask themselves questions such as: What kind of regulation is the most appropriate to strengthen the quality culture of HEIs? What kind of evaluation processes can enhance a culture of quality? What priority areas of public policy and investment are required at this time of consolidation of the higher education system in Ecuador?

The LOR LOES 2018 establishes that CACES “will support the internal assurance of the quality of higher education institutions” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 173). This support can be channeled through the processes of academic qualification and accompaniment of self-evaluation processes, in addition to the accreditation processes that should also contribute to this objective.

The purposes and processes of the quality assurance system must be fully articulated in order to achieve, in a sustainable manner, the quality of higher education. That is why it is necessary to emphasize the system of quality assurance, in which each of the processes and each of the institutions must feed each other reciprocally. The assurance of quality is not, then, an adjunct to evaluation and accreditation, but rather the conceptual and systemic umbrella of the purposes and processes indicated³².

³²This change of focus is the basis for change the institution’s name, which is now called the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (CACES).

Figure 4. System of Quality Assurance of Higher Education of Ecuador



Source: Office of Studies and Research CEAACES, 2018

THE CENTRAL LINES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH

The central axes of the new approach to action of CACES are:

1. To distinguish between evaluation with and without accreditation purposes,
2. To give centrality to self-evaluation processes,
3. To achieve the active participation of HEIs in all quality assurance processes.

The objective of the new approach

To contribute from CACES to the quality assurance of the Higher Education System of Ecuador, promoting the organic and synergistic articulation between internal and external assurance processes of the higher education institutions.

This objective of the work approach is related to the definition of the quality principle inserted in the LOR LOES 2018, which describes:

the continuous and self-reflexive search for improvement, assurance, and collective construction of the culture of quality in higher education, with the participation of all the instances of institutions of higher education and the higher education system. (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 93)

It is also related to the responsibility assigned to CACES in the same law to regulate, plan, and coordinate the Interinstitutional System for the Quality Assurance of higher education (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 171).

Central axes of the change of focus

1. Distinguish between evaluation with and without accreditation purposes

The reason for this distinction is that although evaluation exclusively linked to accreditation has helped HEIs to create and strengthen internal information systems, and to direct their attention to some quality parameters, it has also generated a negative tension, which has led them to reduce their participation to the collection of evidences, especially documents and materials, to comply with the required parameters. This compliance, in some cases, has occurred according to the logic of “adding points” in the criteria that have the greatest weight in the evaluation model, undermining the sense of integral improvement. Under the auspices of the LOES 2010, before its reform in 2018, accreditation led to the categorization of HEIs, which skewed the higher education system towards “ranking” rather than towards quality, understood in its complexities as established here.

This has caused two negative effects: on the one hand, in some cases the participation of the university community in the evaluation processes has been scarce, and a large part of the responsibility has been carried out by a specialized office of the HEI. On the other hand, the evaluation has not led to a deep appreciation of the situation of the HES vis-à-vis Ecuadorian and world reality, centered above all on the substantive processes of teaching and learning; this is because accreditation focuses on the general, shared aspects of HEIs and does not capture the complexity and diversity of the achievements and challenges they face.

For these reasons, the new work approach of CACES, based on LOR LOES 2018, diversifies and broadens the types of evaluations that will be carried out with HEIs, under the common objective of contributing to the assurance of their quality, but with specific objectives and different methodologies to be carried out at different times. The evaluation for accreditation purposes responds directly to the objective of guaranteeing to society the basic conditions of quality of HEIs and is in the category of external assurance of quality. The evaluation without purposes of accreditation responds to the objective of the qualification of HEIs and is in an intermediate category between external and internal assurance of quality, because it is carried out by an external public entity such as CACES but refers to an introspection about the specificities of HEIs and it is voluntary.

³³This objective is based on Art. 97 of the LOR LOES 2018, which deals with academic qualification in substitution of the categorization of higher education institutions established by the LOES 2010.

1.a. External evaluation without accreditation purposes (ESFA))

Objective of the evaluation without accreditation purposes (ESFA)

Contribute to the academic qualification of higher education institutions, understood as the optimal fulfillment of their mission, vision, goals and objectives according to their nature and particularities, supporting them in the identification and improvement of the conditions that foster increased relevance and integrality in fulfilling its core functions³³.

Basing the qualification of the HEIs on the analysis of the fulfillment of their mission, vision, goals and objectives involves placing the institutional strategic planning processes in the spotlight, which will undoubtedly be fortified through providing feedback in the external evaluation without accreditation purposes (ESFA for its initials in Spanish).

This type of evaluation will be carried out with a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology and the application of information gathering techniques that may include surveys, interviews with key actors, observation or focus groups; and it will involve direct contact between the evaluation team and different members of the university community.

The focus of the evaluation without accreditation purposes will be the management of teaching, research, and engagement with society, with a view to the

³⁴An alternative that can be considered in the evaluation without accreditation purposes is to focus on one or two functions of HEIs, in order to better delve into specific dimensions of their mission. Educational innovation, or the specific capacities and strengths that are offered to society, are aspects amenable to external evaluation without accreditation purposes.

³⁵Outside of these periods, CACES may agree to the completion of the academic qualification with one or several HEIs that request it; for example, for cases foreseen in LOES 2018, which establishes that “only universities and polytechnic schools with superior research quality as qualified by CACES, may offer the academic degrees of PhD or its equivalent” (LOES 2018, Art. 121).

purposes that each HEI has set out in its mission, vision, objectives and goals.

This will allow in-depth evaluation of the processes rather than the results and will afford learning for the HEIs on those critical issues that must be overcome in order to improve quality related to their relevance³⁴. Focusing the ESFA on the management of processes involves analyzing organizational structures, actors involved, work approaches, distribution of resources, all aspects that enhance or hinder compliance with what each HEI proposes for fulfilling its core functions.

While the participation of HEIs in evaluation processes without accreditation purposes will be voluntary (pursuant to Article 173 of LOR LOES 2018), CACES will open specific timeframes for its completion, in the midpoint of the interval between one accreditation and another³⁵.

Table 5. Possible periods to promote different types of evaluation

06-2016	01-2022	06-2024	01-2027	06-2029
Evaluation for accreditation purposes	Evaluation without accreditation purposes	Evaluation for accreditation purposes	Evaluation without accreditation purposes	Evaluation for accreditation purposes

According to the number of HEIs that wish to carry out the ESFA, and for the purpose of the ESFA, CACES will agree with the HEIs on the criteria and indicators that will be taken into account in the evaluation. In collective meetings, common indicators for the HEIs involved may be determined; however, as long as the ESFA or academic qualification is structured around the nature and particularities of HEIs, there will also be specific indicators for each. Overlap among similar HEIs may be identified in the process, which can enable coordination and synergies among HEIs, and also greater clarity to focus public policy on higher education, in a way that responds to the heterogeneity in the actual system.

The final reports of the external evaluation without accreditation purposes that are delivered to the HEI will certainly not have a score or point total but will be descriptive and interpretive reports that account for the sort of qualification the HEI achieves.

1 b. External evaluation for accreditation purposes (ECFA) Objective of the evaluation for accreditation purposes of universities and polytechnic schools

Guarantee to Ecuadorian society that the universities and polytechnic schools of the country comply with the principle of quality and inform HEIs and society of the levels of achievement for the parameters established in relation to the three core functions of higher education.

Evaluation with accreditation purposes (ECFA for its initials in Spanish) is the process that CEAACES has been carrying out and CACES will continue. It is a mandatory process for all HEIs (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 173) and CACES is the public body in charge of regulating and performing this evaluation, granting, at the end of the process, the certificates of institutional accreditation to HEIs that have met the requirements, which will last for at least three years (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 174, literals c and g).

At the same time that HEIs are required to be accredited, it is stated that “they should organize the processes that contribute to the internal assurance of quality” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 173), thus connecting the accreditation with the permanent process of continuous improvement of HEIs.

In the case of HEIs that are not accredited, a new ECFA opportunity is established in a period of up to three years, during which the HEIs will develop an improvement plan with the support of CACES (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 96.1).

³⁶The principle of quality.

³⁷The learning outcomes will be taken into account in the accreditation of programs that undergo an examination or other evaluation mechanism for students in the last academic period. The programs that must perform this test, in a compulsory manner, will be determined by CACES and SENESCYT (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 103).

³⁸In accordance with the fourteenth transitory rule, for the next institutional evaluation it will not be necessary to observe the preceding provision, nor for the cases of evaluation processes initiated before the new LOES comes into force (LOES 2018, DT 14).

Other details established by the new LOES 2018 regarding this process refer to the following aspects:

The criteria and other instruments for quality assurance will be established in accordance with the provisions of Art. 93 of this law³⁶, the level and mode of education, as well as the process of access and relationship with the national education system, the actions for permanence, mobility and award of degrees; they will refer fundamentally to the learning environment, to the learning process and pedagogical innovation, and to the learning outcomes (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 95)³⁷.

These instruments will seek the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education and will be established with a validity of at least three years, a period during which they can not be modified (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 95)³⁸.

The difference of the evaluation for accreditation purposes, which will be carried out under the LOES reform reformed in 2018, lies in the type of model that will be applied in the process. Up to now, accreditation has been limited to “compliance with guidelines, standards and quality criteria at the international level” (LOES 2010, Art. 95), while the current regulations define evaluation frameworks in a broader context. specified in a new definition of quality (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 93) and in the precisions made in Art. 95, previously transcribed.

The evaluation models

The “model” for external evaluation without accreditation purposes—if it is necessary to define it—is still to be developed and it will be done in close relation with the HEIs that want to participate in this type of evaluation.

Regarding the evaluation model for accreditation purposes, it is necessary to bear in mind that, as stated before, each conception of quality implies a comparison between reality as it is observed and a reality to which the process aspires to build; therefore, it is always an ideal, where a series of visions and aspirations converge with the intent to achieve these and that define the direction towards which all efforts are directed (Buendía 2007). Hence, in the construction of models of external evaluation, the reality and proposals to improve higher education in Ecuador must be explicit.

The central changes around the “accreditation model” are aimed at substantially improving the criteria, the type of indicators, the sources of information required and the procedures to be followed in the process, seeking to adjust them to the relevance of the work of the HEIs and their national contribution, to focus on the educational realities that impact the teaching-learning process, and to be simple and clear in their measurement.

Returning to what was discussed in the first part of the document, it is worth emphasizing the need to ensure that the operational definition of evaluation indicators does not lose sight of the principles or substantive concepts on which Ecuadorian higher education is based. Therefore, it is worth bearing in mind the aims of higher education that the LOR LOES 2018 establishes.

PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 8)

- a) Contribute to the development of universal thinking, the deployment of scientific production, the arts and culture and the promotion of technological transfers and innovations.
- b) Foster in the students a reflective spirit oriented towards the achievement of personal autonomy, in a framework of freedom of thought and ideological

pluralism.

c) Contribute to the knowledge, preservation and enrichment of ancestral knowledge and national culture.

d) Form responsible academics and professionals, in all fields of knowledge, with an ethical conscience and sense of solidarity, capable of contributing to the development of the institutions of the Republic, to the effectiveness of the democratic order, and to stimulate social participation.

e) Contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime foreseen in the Constitution and in the National Development Plan.

f) Encourage and execute research programs of a scientific, technological and pedagogical nature that contribute to the improvement and protection of the environment and promote sustainable national development in harmony with the constitutionally recognized rights of nature, prioritizing animal welfare.

g) Constitute spaces for the strengthening of the Constitutional State, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, plurinational and secular.

h) Contribute to local and national development on a permanent basis, through community work or engagement with society.

i) Promote the generation of programs, projects and mechanisms to strengthen innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer in all areas of knowledge.

j) Recognize culture and the arts as producers of knowledge and builders of new memories, as well as the right of people to access the knowledge produced by cultural activity, and of artists to be part of teaching processes in the Higher Education System.

k) Develop and strengthen the bilingual intercultural higher education system, with criteria for quality and in accordance with cultural diversity.

l) Strengthen the use of ancestral languages and cultural expressions in different fields of knowledge.

UNESCO points out that there are three approaches to the principle of educational quality: pedagogical, social interaction and rational-technical (Tawil, Akkari, Macedo 2012, quoted in Zerega and Murrieta 2017).

The pedagogical approach focuses on the teaching-learning processes and on students and understands that an education is of quality when it is good didactically. The social interaction approach is related to the vision of education as a social contract and considers the vision of the actors as central. This approach considers that an education is of quality when it is good for the community or the community is involved in its construction. (Zerega and Murrieta 2017, 157)

Finally, the rational-technical approach, which is what has been assumed in the Ecuadorian regulations, is basically quantitative and aims to compare results. This approach understands that an education is of quality when it is good comparatively.

Within the framework of the new system of quality assurance in Ecuador, the aim must be to aspire that evaluation models achieve a balanced combination of these approaches on different scales, depending on whether they are institutions or programs.

In evaluation models, information sources are key. With a change of focus, it is necessary to analyze the changes that are required in what has been called “evidence,” an unfortunate term as some, if not most, aspects related to higher education are not self-evident, except through documentation, and it is necessary to investigate more thoroughly to capture them. It is necessary to contrast the roles with the reality, for which direct contact of peer evaluators with the different actors of the educational communities is a central element.

³⁹For example, the weights and utility functions of the indicators of the models. The reason for this fact, according to CEAACES officials, is that because the actual performance of the HES was not known, it was risky to define these aspects in advance, since it could negatively affect the HEIs.

Regarding the procedures, the quantity of information provided to the HEIs must increase and be qualified for the evaluation and accreditation processes, since there have been justifiable complaints that they have not been informed about the entire model to be applied and aspects of it have been made known to HEIs in the midst of accreditation processes³⁹. The provision of Article 95 of the new LOES 2018 that establishes the requirement to have the evaluation instruments three years in advance, aims precisely to generate greater transparency in the process, greater legal certainty and, above all, makes it possible for HEIs to strengthen their internal quality assurance systems for evaluation processes.

The experience of CEAACES shows that there are two central elements to be taken into account in the evaluation processes so that they meet their objectives:

indicators that appropriately measure the realities under observation and peer evaluators with appropriate profiles.

The first, the way in which the indicators of each criterion and sub-criterion of the evaluation models are measured and valued—as previously stated—deserves an in-depth analysis so that they can adequately capture the quality parameters of the core functions of HEIs, and they are well articulated in the model.

The second element and, perhaps, one of the most important in the evaluation processes is that the academic pairs have profiles that contribute to the evaluation. This implies that they are open, receptive, and that they are attuned to what is sought in each of these processes. The peers will not have the same role in an evaluation without accreditation purposes, as in one that seeks accreditation or in accompaniment to self-evaluation processes. For CACES, the challenge is to improve the call for peer evaluators with adequate communication strategies and with incentives for public and private HEIs faculty to participate; to refine

⁴⁰See working document: “Institutional self-evaluation as a tool for quality assurance”, DEI-CEAACES, 2016b

the selection procedures; and to qualify performance of peer evaluators through sustained training processes that aim to certify them as peer evaluators, and also through evaluation of the evaluators by those evaluated.

Finally, it is essential to permanently address the training of technical teams, as well as to make meaningful use of the information collected, returning it systematized and analyzed to HEIs as a central input for their continuous improvement. Likewise, close coordination between the technical and administrative levels of CACES is indispensable, as the scope of the challenges posed demands a sense of ownership and participation by all of them in the substantive institutional processes.

2. Give centrality to the institutional self-evaluation process

Objective:

Promote the habit of permanent self-evaluation in HEIs so that they can act in order to fortify their strengths and overcome their weaknesses, by means of continuous improvement

Self-evaluation is the central core of the quality assurance system (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 94). It constitutes the key process to make the quality principle a reality because it contributes to “the continuous and self-reflective search for the improvement, assurance, and collective construction of the culture of superior educational quality” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 93). CACES is responsible for regulating the institutional self-evaluation (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 173), but the main responsibility for this lies with the higher education institutions.

For this reason, self-evaluation, although regulated in its general guidelines by CACES, should be an autonomous exercise specific to HEIs in terms of how

to carry it out and what criteria and indicators to base it on. It will not be a “requirement” for external evaluations, and in case the HEI decides to carry it out, it will be considered as an input for these processes.

CACES must promote the importance and value of self-evaluation among HEIs, as a fundamental mechanism that can cover different purposes: to assess parameters similar to those of external evaluation, as a preparation exercise for those processes; to strengthen the processes of institutional strategic planning linked to the monitoring and evaluation of its core functions; to inquire about critical issues for the improvement of certain functions that are considered weakest in institutional operations; to analyze strengths that enable them to qualify in certain areas, among other objectives.

CACES must also promote the importance of including in the self-evaluation the different members of the educational community, such that authorities, professors, students, and administrative staff understand the meaning of each one’s actions in relation to quality improvement of the institution as a whole. In addition, it can encourage the observance of technical criteria that enable HEIs to have reliable information for their self-evaluation and in relation to transparency and rigor.

In self-evaluation processes, reflection about the processes must prevail; key questions must be asked to generate reflection in the institution; negative trends identified; changes in approaches and procedures proposed and adjustments made in strategic institutional planning. To the extent that not all HEIs are familiar with self-evaluation and some manifest their weaknesses in this type of process⁴⁰, CACES will accept requests for technical and academic support, and these can be addressed by technical institutional staff and / or through hiring of academic peers. The HEIs can directly contact peers from other universities and polytechnic schools to be facilitators of their self-evaluation processes.

If HEIs request accompaniment from CACES for self-evaluation processes, its role should be to generate technical and methodological support documents; transmit knowledge about successful experiences of other HEIs; provide information that they can learn from; capture and record information of interest about what is happening in the institution to compare and analyze the evolution of the HES; observe, listen and register the institutions' opinions about themselves and about the work of CACES. It is not the role of CACES to validate or qualify the self-evaluation of HEIs, because it is their process; how they perform it and how reliable their results are their responsibility.

3. Substantial participation of HEIs in quality assurance processes

Objective

Achieve the active participation of HEIs in the promotion of the quality assurance system of higher education.

It has become commonplace in state discourse to speak of participatory processes. These have been made viable through the so-called “socializations” in which groups of the interested population have been invited so as to inform them about documents, laws, and policies that have been defined by the state agencies. This vision distorts the concept of participation, since the invitation to society has served, in most cases, to legitimize such proposals rather than to actively participate in the issues of interest from their own spaces and considerations.

The evaluation processes of higher education in the last decade have been constrained by the short timeframes and urgent deadlines defined in the Constitution and laws. This has been an influential factor in making the initiative come mainly from the state, which currently is not in line with the

consolidation of SIAC, which demands an active participation of HEIs.

It is recognized that the processes carried out so far by CEAACES have brought some benefits, such as the requirement to improve the information systems in HEIs and greater awareness of aspects related to achieving quality that were previously ignored. “The accreditation has led to the design of processes of planning, improvement, and strengthening within HEIs [...] allowed to consolidate a more homogeneous educational programming of quality, with greater institutionality and responsibility toward civil society” (Zerega and Murrieta 2017, 166). However, judging by opinions expressed in forums, meetings and by some critical publications, HEIs have also perceived CEAACES as an auditor, rather than as an instance of evaluation leading to the promotion of quality, which has generated a relationship of mutual distrust and, in some cases, a passive and submissive attitude on the part of HEIs towards the directives emanating from CEAACES.

Positive and negative assessments must be taken into account to now turn to the challenges that lie ahead, on the basis of a smooth and collaborative relationship between CACES and the HEIs, which symbolically supports a “confidence pact.”

If the priority of the present moment is defined as strengthening of quality assurance processes of HEIs to advance in the consolidation of the quality assurance system, it is vital that they participate in the discussions of the proposed new approach and its practical implications as well as in all processes that are organized in the immediate and foreseeable future.

It is imperative to create room for dialogue between CACES and the HEIs, beyond the paradigm of “socializations,” in which adequate levels of analysis, reflection and agreements can be achieved. A new opportunity is opened in relation to the discussion of the model to be implemented in the next evaluation process for accreditation purposes, but also when incorporating into the organic structure

of CACES the permanent Advisory Committee “composed of HES delegates” (LOR LOES 2018, Art. 178), which will allow a new channel of dialogue with the representatives of the HEIs.

IV. IMMEDIATE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

The new LOES clearly outlines the next steps in the implementation of processes that aim to ensure quality:

- Adjustment of the institutional evaluation model within 180 days from the publication of LOR LOES 2018 in the Official Registry (LOR LOES 2018, DT 1^a) (August 2018-January 2019).
- Implementation of the institutional evaluation for accreditation purposes (institutional accreditation) of universities and polytechnic schools within 18 months of the publication of the LOR LOES 2018 in the Official Registry (LOR LOES 2018, DT 14) (August 2018-January 2020).
- Adjustment of the institutional evaluation models of higher institutes and programs of universities and polytechnic schools, in accordance with the provisions of the LOES 2018, within 18 months of the publication of the LOR LOES 2018 in the Official Registry (LOR LOES 2018, DT 14) (August 2018-January 2020).
- Definition of the schedule for performing the evaluations of higher institutes and programs of the universities and polytechnic schools within 18 months from the publication in the Official Registry (LOES 2018, DT 14) (August 2018-January 2020).

- Incorporation of intercultural criteria for the evaluation of the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University within 180 days from the publication in the Official Registry (LOR LOES 2018, Sixth DT of the Sixth Amendment).
- Approval of the model and evaluation schedule of the Amawtay Wasi Intercultural University within 180 days from the date on which the University submits the files for approval to the HES bodies (LOR LOES 2018, Fifth DT of the Sixth Amendment).

The implementation of these processes will demand of CACES an intense agenda of activities that must be planned to achieve success. Some of the priority lines of action at the internal level have to do with the following aspects:

- Regulation adjustment. The LOR LOES 2018 establishes as a priority, together with the adjustment of the institutional evaluation model, the organization of the quality assurance system, which must be fulfilled within 180 days of the approval of the law (LOR LOES 2018, DT 1^a).
- Adjustment of institutional strategic planning. An adjustment to the strategic planning of CACES is required so that it is framed in the provisions of LOR LOES 2018. This involves considering adjustments to the institutional mission and vision, the strategic objectives, the organizational structure and other necessary aspects.

In relation to the next institutional evaluation process for accreditation purposes of universities and polytechnic schools, the following strategic actions will be considered:

- Immediate hiring of a team of specialists with experience in institutional evaluation, to support the technical team of CACES and the Institutional

Evaluation Commission in the participatory elaboration of the evaluation model. The team's work will include conducting several workshops with HEIs, university networks and other groups of university actors.

- Training of peer reviewers, aligned with the work approach of CACES and framed in the provisions of LOR LOES 2018.
- Adjustments to the GIIES platform according to the model and procedures established in the relevant regulations. Users of the platform in the UEPs will be consulted so as to receive suggestions and improve accessibility and functionality.
- Training for CACES technical teams and their active participation in the construction of the model and other procedures that they will drive.

A key aspect is the adequate communication of the changes to the public bodies of the HES, to the HEIs—through the consultation body, the University Assembly and existing networks—and in meetings convened expressly by CACES. Likewise, it is important to communicate with peer reviewers who have collaborated in previous CEAACES processes and to other professors who can participate in that role in the processes to come.

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CACES: Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior; Higher Education Quality Assurance Council

CEAACES: Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior; Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education

CES: Consejo de Educación Superior; Higher Education Council

CONEA: Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación; National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation

CONESUP: Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior

CONUEP: Consejo Nacional de Universidades y Escuelas Politécnicas; National Council of Universities and Polytechnic Schools

ECFA: Evaluación con fines de acreditación; Evaluation with accreditation purposes

EHEP: Examen de Habilitación para el Ejercicio Profesional; Qualifying Examination for Professional Practice

ENEC: Examen Nacional de Evaluación de Carreras; National Examination of Program Evaluation

ESFA: Evaluación sin fines de acreditación; Evaluation without accreditation purposes

HEI: Higher Education Institutions

HES: Higher Education System

IES: instituciones de educación superior
LOES: Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior; Organic Law of Higher Education

LOR LOES: Ley Orgánica Reformatorio a la Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior; Reform to the Organic Law of Higher Education

RO: Registro Oficial; Ofical Registry

SENESCYT: Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación; Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

SENPLADES: Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo

SES: Sistema de Educación Superior

SIAC: Sistema Interinstitucional de Aseguramiento de la Calidad; Interinstitutional System of Quality Assurance

UEP: Universidades y Escuelas Politécnicas; Universities and Polytechnic Schools

UNESCO: Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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