AUDIT PROGRAMME

Guide to the design of
internal quality assurance systems
in higher education

Document 01

INDEX

- **FOREWORD**

- **FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGNING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS**

  ### 1.- FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE
  1.1. Quality assurance in Spanish universities.
  1.2. Quality assurance in the EHEA.

  ### 2.- SPECIFICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS
  2.1. The interest group approach
  2.2. The frame of reference: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance.
  2.3. The AUDIT programme

- **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUDIT PROGRAMME**

  ### 1.- STAGES OF THE AUDIT PROGRAMME.

  ### 2.- STAGES IN THE DESIGN OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS.

  ### 3.- STAGES PRIOR TO THE DEFINING AND DOCUMENTING OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS.

FOREWORD

The Spanish higher education system as a whole, together with every higher education institution, must comply with the commitment to satisfy the needs of and expectations generated by society. In the context of a knowledge society and the increasing internationalisation of university programmes, the quality assurance of different degree programmes on the various levels of higher education is an inescapable challenge, and all the more so given that the universities have been confided with the trust and allocated considerable resources by society to fulfil this function.

In accordance with the trust placed by society in the autonomous administration of the universities and the transparency called for within the framework of the EHEA, the universities must ensure that their activities are appropriately orientated in order for the goals associated with the degree programmes they give to be attained. The universities need policies and internal quality assurance schemes (SGIC) for this that are formally established and publicly available.

Elements to regulate a wide variety of aspects such as university admission, the management of student records, examinations and the issuing of degree certificates have already been introduced in the regulatory framework in Spain, all of which clearly serve to assure the quality of degree programmes.

The incorporation of continuous improvement strategies enables the universities to also develop and control, review and redefine their actions until they attain the anticpated goals. Such actions are not a new development in Spanish universities; with the support of the quality assurance (QA) agencies, the universities have been carrying out processes involving the assessment and certification of their degree programmes and gathering the opinions of students and other groups regarding these since the end of the nineties.

An analysis of these initiatives in the light of the obligations acquired in the EHEA however reveals that they need to be organised more systematically by universities in order to effectively contribute to quality assurance. The preparation of an orderly and systematic series of internal quality assurance systems could meet this need by giving a new meaning to the different actions undertaken in terms of the evaluation of degree programmes, services and teaching staff; the analysis of student and graduate satisfaction; the analysis of graduate employment; and information to society.

Furthermore, the regulatory framework in Spain also establishes that the different review bodies (agencies) must contribute by way of external assessment processes to ensuring the goals of university quality. The

internal quality assurance system (IQAS) of the Spanish higher education system should consist of the orderly combination of internal and external actions by both universities and agencies. This is why it is not just universities but also agencies that are required to establish their own IQAS and to undergo external evaluation in accordance with the European standards and guidelines adopted in Bergen (2005) by the ministers signatory to the Bologna Process.

The goal of the AUDIT programme initiative, which is promoted by ANECA, AQU and ACSUG, is to guide and facilitate universities, and in particular faculties and university colleges and schools, in the process of defining these systems. The programme examines the commitment to participate in and support the various frameworks for technical collaboration between the universities and the agencies. In this respect, it is meant to serve as an open framework within which institutions participate.

The aim of this initiative, which is aimed at faculties and university colleges and schools as the organisational scope of reference both internally and for students and society in general, is to **provide guidance for the design** of IQAS as a whole so that all activities associated with the quality assurance of degree programmes developed up until now can be included. With this aim in mind, this *Guide to the **design** of internal quality assurance systems in higher education* (Document 01) has been drawn up, in conjunction with two other documents, *Guidelines for the design of internal quality assurance systems in higher education* (Document 02), and *Tools for the diagnosis* (Document 03).

Although the guidelines provided are aimed at the faculty and university school level[1], there are certain transversal elements aimed at the university as a whole (for example, in relation to academic staff, physical resources and services, etc.). The instructions contained in the Guide deal with two basic issues:

a) How HEIs use their units, regulations, standards, procedures, etc. to enhance the quality of the design and development of their programmes, the selection and promotion of teaching staff, classroom activities and learning outcomes.

b) How HEIs involve different interest groups in the design, development, evaluation and dissemination of teaching activities.

The AUDIT programme is also meant to be a tool that contributes towards the recognition of HEI-designed IQAS, and it will therefore include a **verification process** of an HEI's IQAS, the criteria and procedures of

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[1] Translator's note: the Spanish term "centro" used in the original text refers to the internal level of faculties, university colleges and schools. The term "higher education institution" or the acronym HEI henceforth may either refer to both this internal level or to the university as a whole.

which are to be set out in another document titled *Guide to the* **verification** *of the design of internal quality assurance systems*.

The verification process will enable HEIs to assure the appropriateness and relevance of the design through compliance with the prerequisites.

A third stage of the AUDIT programme sees the **certification process** of IQAS implemented by institutions being brought to a conclusion. The procedure for carrying out the certification process is given in the *Guide to the* **certification** *of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions*.

The aspects included in the AUDIT programme form an integral part of the requisites established in the forthcoming VERIFICA programme, which will deal with the regulatory instructions for the authorisation and registering of undergraduate and Master's degrees. Efforts will thereby be brought into line and facilitation given to the universities' participation in the processes included in the verification of prospective degrees and Master's degrees.

It is the intention of the agencies promoting the AUDIT programme that the development of internal quality assurance systems is also encouraged within the agencies themselves, so that the synergy and convergence of the internal and external dimensions of quality assurance have repercussions on the higher education system as a whole.

FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGNING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

1. FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

1.1. Quality assurance in Spanish universities.

Article 31 on quality assurance of the newly reformed Spanish Universities Act states the need for standards of quality assurance to be set in order to facilitate evaluation, certification and accreditation, and considers quality assurance as an essential purpose of university policy.

Furthermore, the new organisation of university degrees proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science in a document dated 26 September 2006 includes quality assurance as one of the basic elements that programmes of study must provide for.

This consideration is clearly shown in the document *Guidelines for designing undergraduate and Master's degrees*, published by the Ministry of Education and Science on 21 December 2006. The need to introduce a quality assurance system as one of the essential elements in any new programme proposed in the future is stated in the general principles proposed for the design of all new degree programmes.

For many university institutions, the incorporation of internal quality assurance systems into their degrees is not a new development. Quality assessment and improvements to degree programmes in Spanish universities have been carried out since 1996 through the National University Quality Assessment Plan, the Second University Quality Plan, ANECA's Institutional Assessment Programme, and/or other similar programmes carried out by the regional agencies (ACSUG, AGAE and AQU). Since 2005, proposals for recognised postgraduate programmes have also been assessed to check the worthiness of the designs submitted prior to the programmes actually being started.

In addition to degree programmes, the quality of university *services* have been assessed since the late nineties using approaches that focus on quality management and organisational excellence.

Processes have also been developed since 2003 to assure the quality of the teaching staff being hired by universities, which involve the evaluation of teaching and research merits by a quality assurance agency independent of the universities themselves.

Lastly, two significant facts are worthy of particular mention:

- The gathering of information on the opinions and satisfaction of the users, especially students, has been established for a long time in many universities. Surveys on student satisfaction regarding teaching have been carried out since 1981, and more recently graduates and employers have been included in these.

- Different HEIs have had experience with quality assurance associated with programming, reviewing and improving degrees based on the use of internationally recognised quality models such as EFQM and ISO 9000.

Unfortunately, some of the initiatives enumerated above, which incorporate systems for setting up quality assurance in the universities, have lacked a systematic and structured approach to the continuous enhancement of education offered to students.

1.2. Quality assurance in the EHEA.

In an analysis of quality assurance within the European scope of higher education, mention must first be made of the recommendations for quality assurance in HEIs drafted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in its document *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*[2].

Secondly, these recommendations serve as a reference for defining and evaluating quality assurance in HEIs in different European countries, although it is observed that different courses of quality assurance have developed[3].

Within the various strategies used for quality assurance in higher education, there is a tendency to use formulae that incorporate internal quality assurance, the responsibility for which is in the hands of the universities, together with external quality assurance processes that are the responsibility of the QA agencies.

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[2] ENQA: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

[3] In countries like France, United Kingdom, Sweden and Finland, an *institutional audit* is carried out to evaluate quality assurance in HEIs, whereas in Austria and Norway this type of evaluation is carried out by way of an *institutional accreditation*. An institutional accreditation uses a mixed system based on institutional accreditation and programme accreditation. *Programme evaluation* is another approach to quality assurance adopted in countries like Portugal and Denmark, as is *programme accreditation* which is carried out in Italy, Ireland, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic and Poland. See:
  Finland: http://www.kka.fi/english/
  France: http://www.cne-evaluation.fr (The former agency. A new Agency, the *Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*, has been set up and its website is in the process of being set up).
  Norway http://www.nokut.no/sw335.asp
  United Kingdom: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/
  Switzerland http://www.oaq.ch/pub/in/01_00_00_home.php

This is why priority is given in the European guidelines to reinforce university autonomy and implement effective internal quality assurance systems, which will then be evaluated, reviewed and audited by the QA agencies. This external control, which culminates with **accreditation**, would provide for the consolidation of control by the university itself from within.

It is possible to set up an internal quality assurance system for HEIs according to both both internal and external approaches, as is shown in Figure 1.
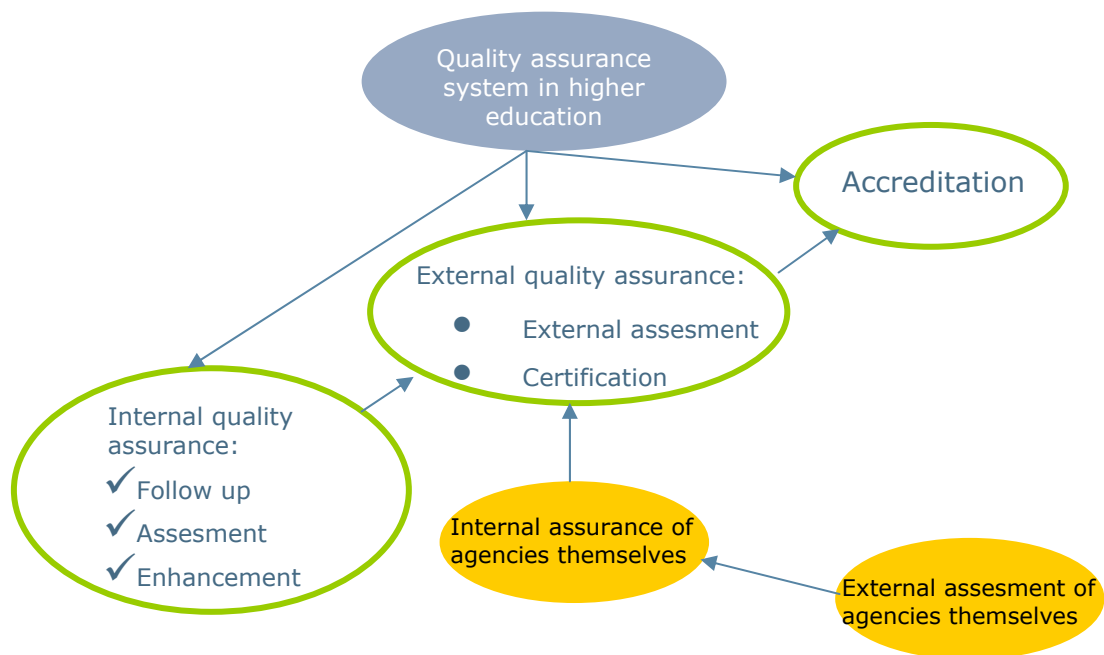

Figure 1. An internal quality assurance system in higher education.

2. SPECIFICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

Quality assurance can be described as the *systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement* [4].

Within the framework of educational policies and processes developed by the universities, quality assurance has enabled institutions to *demonstrate that they take the quality of their programmes and awards seriously and are willing to put into place the means to assuring and demonstrate their quality* [5].

The development of quality assurance systems calls for an appropriate balance between the actions promoted by HEIs and external quality assurance procedures promoted by QA agencies. The two of these together make up the internal quality assurance system of the Spanish higher education system.

The design of systems by the universities will involve:

- Determining the needs and expectations of students and other interest groups, in relation to the programmes offered by HEIs.
- Establishing the aims and scope of the internal quality assurance system.
- Determining the standards for quality assurance.

2.1. The interest group approach.

When designing an internal quality assurance system, both the explicit and implicit quality requirements of the different interest groups must be taken into consideration in relation to the programmes given in an institution, with special attention being paid to the students.

Once the needs and expectations of the interest groups have been analysed, it is the responsibility of the HEIs to then establish their internal quality assurance systems. The designed set of systems must be visible both in the institution and, above all, to interest groups outside of it.

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[4] ASEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORK QUALITY - ASSURANCE. *Manual for the Implementation of the Guidelines*. 2004, p. 20.
[5] ENQA: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Quote from p. 9.

It is the responsibility of the external QA agencies to evaluate and accredit the suitability of these systems so that they fulfil the needs and expectations of the different interest groups.

By way of example, several of the main aspects to be dealt with in relation to the main interest groups are given below:

Interest group	Example of aspects to be taken into consideration in internal quality assurance systems
Students	Student selection and admissions, programme specification, teaching organisation and activities, learning support systems, learning outcomes and graduate employment, etc.
University (on the various different levels of managers, teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff	Student selection and admissions, programme specification, teaching organisation and activities, learning support systems, teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff, resources, progress and academic performance, learning outcomes and graduate employment, information systems, etc.
Employers	Courses offered, programme specification, quality of programmes and graduate employment, etc.
Education authorities	Courses offered, programme specification, academic and auxiliary staff, progress and academic performance, quality of programmes and graduate employment, costs, etc.
Society in general	Educational demand and supply, progress and academic results, employment, etc.

2.2. The frame of reference: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

The defining and development of internal quality assurance systems should taken into consideration both the *Guidelines for designing undergraduate and Master's degrees* laid down by the Ministry of Education and Science, and ENQA's *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

On the basis of these two sources, and in order to facilitate the development of a common framework of reference that can be used by both HEIs and agencies, this Guide takes the following criteria into consideration:

1. Quality policy and goals:

The institution shall consolidate a quality culture based on a known and publicly available quality policy and goals and those in charge of the study programme's internal quality assurance system.

2. Programme design:

The institution shall have mechanisms to maintain and update its programmes and develop methodologies to approve, control, evaluate and periodically enhance their quality. In addition, these mechanisms shall provide for the eventual suspension of the qualification, and also the ways that suggestions and appeals are dealt with.

3. Classroom activities and other student-orientated actions:

The institution shall have procedures whereby it can check that the purpose of any action that it undertakes, including outside work experience and mobility, is to encourage learning by the student.

4. Academic staff and auxiliary teaching staff:

The institution must have mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, administration and training of its teaching and auxiliary teaching staff is carried out with the necessary guarantees to ensure they can fulfil their corresponding functions.

5. Physical resources and services:

The institution shall have mechanisms that enable it to design, manage and improve its services and physical resources in order for student learning to develop appropriately.

6. Outcomes:

The institution must develop procedures to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analysed and used for decision-making and the enhancement of the quality of degree programmes.

7. Public information:

The institution shall have mechanisms to ensure the periodic publication of updated information on programmes of study.

2.3. The AUDIT programme

The development of an internal quality assurance system requires the methodical arrangement and structuring of any existing *internal quality assurance* systems in the universities that deal with the planning of degree programmes, the evaluation and review of their development, and decision-making to improve learning (see Figure 2).
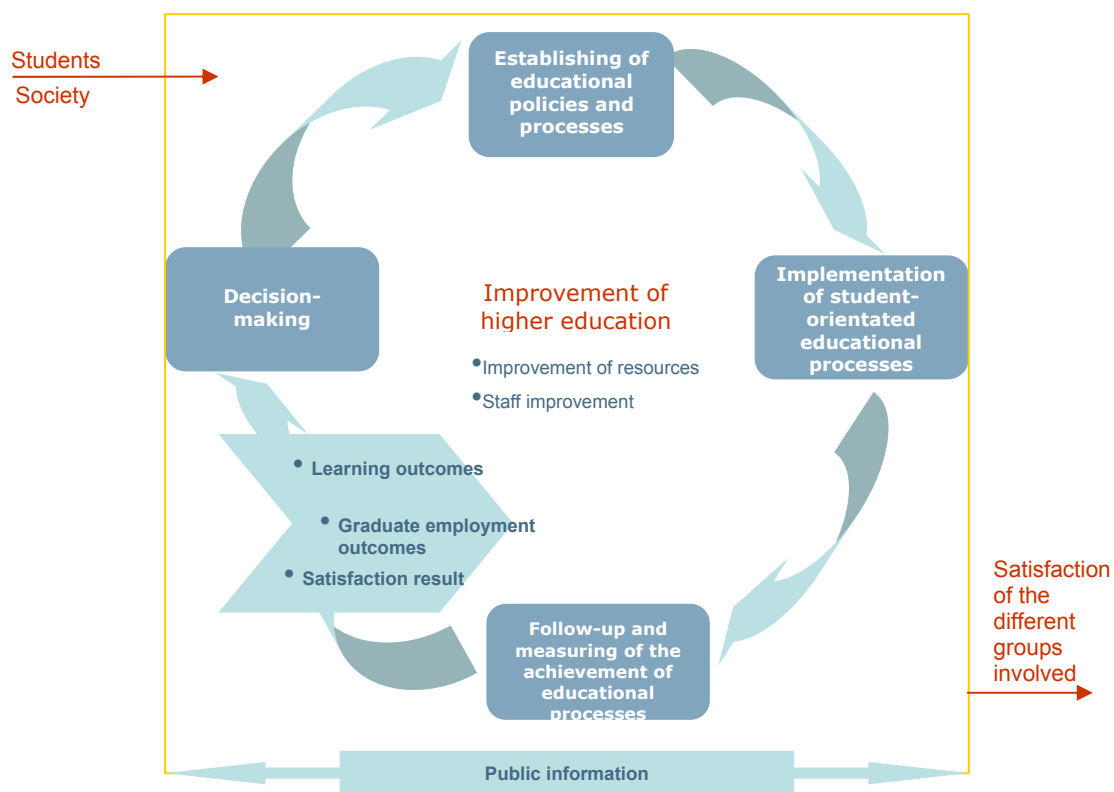

Figure 2: Continuous improvement cycle of university education

It will also require *external quality assurance* systems from the agencies to evaluate and accredit the internal quality assurance of HEIs.

The AUDIT programme has been produced by ANECA, AQU and ASUG with the intention of stimulating the development of internal quality assurance systems through both internal and external approaches.[6]

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[6] The term "audit" chosen as the name for this programme comes from the Latin term "audire" (to hear) and is frequently used in Europe to refer to processes for assessing quality in HEIs. The term *audit* was chosen to refer to the evaluation of quality assurance systems within the scope of these institutions.

The AUDIT programme pursues two basic aims:

    a. To provide HEIs with guidance for the design of internal quality assurance systems for degree programmes that they offer.

    b. To implement a procedure that leads to recognition of the design of these systems by QA agencies.

This Guide is one of the documents that make up the AUDIT programme[7] and is directed at helping HEIs design their internal quality assurance procedures and systems through the integration of all activities already introduced for the quality assurance of their degree programmes.

As can be seen in Figure 3, consideration was given in the preparation of the AUDIT programme to the quality assurance systems currently in place in Spanish universities, which stem to a great extent from the improvement-orientated evaluation programmes carried out during the nineties, together with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Science, the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance and the experience of different European universities in this field.
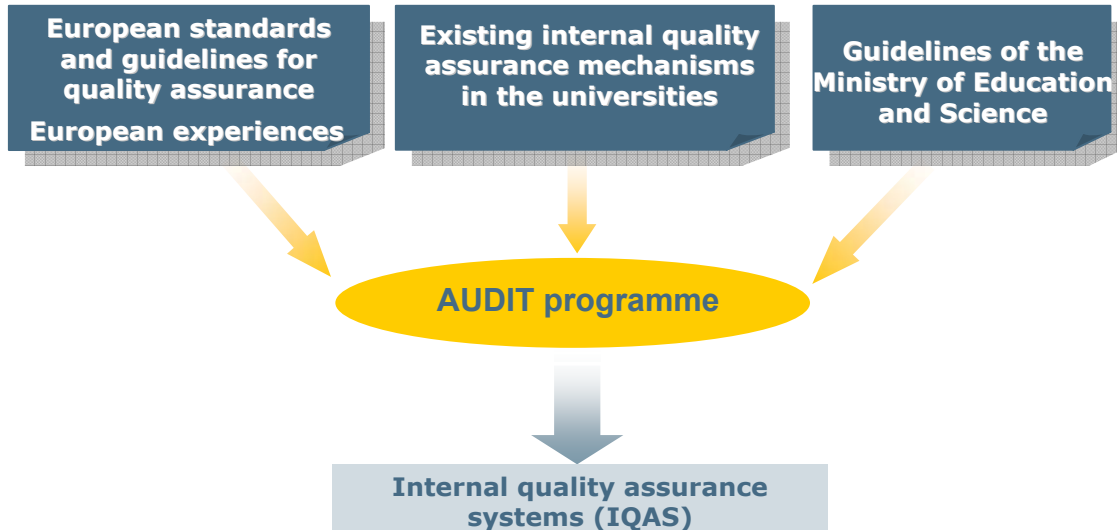
European standards and guidelines for quality assurance European experiences	Existing internal quality assurance mechanisms in the universities	Guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Science

AUDIT programme

Internal quality assurance systems (IQAS)

Figure 3: Elements that interact in the AUDIT programme

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[7] Other documents forming part of the AUDIT programme will deal with the initial diagnosis protocol, the verification guidelines and the certification guidelines.

The result of this is a design for the institution's internal quality assurance system.

Bearing in mind the HEIs own quality policies and the factors that determine the development of their activities, the instructions provided in the Guide are for HEIs to set up appropriate internal quality assurance systems in order to analyse their results, design the degree programmes that they offer in a more appropriate way, review their development and introduce necessary changes, all within a continuous improvement cycle.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUDIT PROGRAMME

1. STAGES OF THE AUDIT PROGRAMME

The stages envisaged in the development of the AUDIT programme comprise actions aimed at promoting internal quality assurance that are referred to in this Guide, and actions associated with external quality assurance.

ANECA and the regional QA agencies.		HEIs / University		
AUDIT stages	**Results**	**Design and development stages**	**Results**	
GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING THE IQAS	• Guide to designing IQAS in higher education.	**COMMITMENT**	• Establishing of formal commitment by the university and faculty to the IQAS.	
	• Publication and dissemination of the Guide to **designing** IQAS in higher education.	**PLANNING**	• Planning of the stages to be followed as the IQAS is developed.	
	• Announcement of the Call for universities to participate in the IQAS **design**.	**DIAGNOSTIC**	• Requirements análisis report regarding QA activities.	
		DEFINITION AND DOCUMENTATION	• Definition of: o Quality policy and aims o Context for implementing the IQAS o Interests groups that the IQAS is aimed at o Scope of IQAS o Processes involved in implementing an IQAS.	
IQAS DESIGN VERIFICATION	• Guide to **verifying** the IQAS design. • Publication and dissemination of Guide • **Verification** of IQAS design by HEIs. • Drafting of IQAS design verification report.	**PARTICIPATION IN THE VERIFICATION**	• Referral of documentation for IQAS design verification. • Verification report received.	
		IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTING	• Improvements to IQAS. • Implementation of IQAS optimised in the design stage. • Information of institution's IQAS published.	
CERTIFICATION OF IQAS IMPLEMENTATION	• Guide for IQAS **certification**. • Publication and dissemination of Guide. • **Certification** of IQAS. • Drafting of IQAS desing **certification** report	**PARTICIPATION IN CERTIFICATION**	• Referral of documentation for IQAS certification. • Certification report received.	

Scopes of this Guide

Scope of the AUDIT programme

2. STAGES IN THE DESIGN OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS.

As set out in the outline for the development of the AUDIT programme, this Guide gives a step-by-step description of the stages to be followed in the design of internal quality assurance systems in higher education. These stages should therefore be dealt with progressively by the institution, with documentary evidence being provided for the compliance of each one:

Stage 1: Commitment.
Stage 2: Planning.
Stage 3: Diagnosis.
Stage 4: Definition and documentation.

Stages in the design of internal quality assurance systems

PREREQUISITES	STAGES	ANTICIPATE RESULTS	RESPONSIBILITES	RESOURCES
Signing of the agreement	COMMITMENT	- Participation of institution's governing board in IQAS design - Explicit statements in favour of a quality culture.	Faculty/University	- Necessary human and material resources
Commitment of key persons in the institution/University to quality assurance	PLANNING	- Support structure linked to the institution's organisational structure. - Planning of the different stages.	- Governing and administrative bodies - Delegate committes - Technical units - Other bodies	- Regulations, rules, procedure manuals and aids.
Support structure for IQAS diagnosis	DIAGNOSIS	- Diagnosis of IQAS: identification of consolidated elements and requirements regarding quality assurance.	- Designated unit of team - Governing board of institution/University - Representatives / sectors	- Tools to diagnose the institution's IQAS
Diagnosis of institution's IQAS	DEFINITION AND DOCUMENTATION	- Quality policy and aims. - IQAS design.	- Designated unit of team - Governing and administrative bodies of institution/University - University' social council	- Guides by ANECA and regional QA agencies - ENQA standards and guidelines - Normas ISO - ISO standards - EFQM models

3. STAGES PRIOR TO THE DEFINING AND DOCUMENTING OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS.

STAGE 1: COMMITMENT

In this stage, the faculty (university school or college) and university must undertake to develop an internal quality assurance system that promotes the quality culture.

This means that the institution must at least recognise the importance of quality and quality assurance in its activities.

In this stage, the HEI should define:

- The level of participation by the faculty/school and the university's governing body in quality assurance systems.
- A statement that reflects the commitment to quality and willingness to take the role of leadership of the institution's governing and administrative bodies, and that guarantees the allocation of resources for development of the project.
- The body, unit or group in charge of leading the system design process.

STAGE 2: PLANNING

During this stage, the HEI must consider the support structures that will be necessary for the design and development of internal quality assurance systems.

It is essentail for all staff involved to know about and share the goals for developing the system.

In this stage, the HEI should define:

- The main stakeholders involved in the development of the system and their responsibilities.
- The basic support structures that will serve as the starting point for its development.
- The planning of the different stages in the design of the internal quality assurance system, including costs.
- The means used to involve staff and to transmit the goals and basic aspects of the system's design.
- The process whereby the institution's bodies approve the design.

STAGE 3: DIAGNOSIS

In this stage, the HEI must carry out a diagnosis in order to obtain an overview of its current situation, which will serve as the starting point for designing the internal quality assurance system, according to the recommendations given in this Guide.

For this, it will need to:

- Identify the main elements to be taken into account in the diagnosis:
    1. Laws, regulations, rules and standards that regulate higher education.
    2. Organisational structure (functions and activities) that supports the design and development of university education.
    3. Procedures and mechanisms associated with the enhancement of university education.
- Establish the procedure to gather data on aspects included in the Guide associated with the prospective internal quality assurance system, and sources of information to be consulted.
- Establish those responsible for the diagnosis, including those in the different units, teams, departments and courses.
- Identify and prioritise detected requirements, bearing in mind the HEI's characteristics and their scope and importance.

This study should be internal and for guidance purposes, and considered as a working paper when the following design stage is begun.

The guidelines for developing the contents of this Guide are given in document 02, "Guidelines for designing internal quality assurance systems". This gives an overview of the aspects to be considered when defining and documenting the faculty or school's internal quality assurance system.