The evolution of the AUDIT programme in Unibasq

Self-evaluation and external evaluation of the approaches and quality levels of the services that an institution has achieved constitute one of the diagnosis and continuous improvement methods that has spread more widely amongst public and private institutions of very different backgrounds.

It has been the traditional method used for many years in education for the evaluation of quality standards, introduced in Spanish universities through "Institutional Evaluation".

This method demanded the creation of new support structures in universities, known as "Quality Units" (QU), which, in many cases, were difficult to place in institutional organigrams. QUs gained weight progressively, proving their need and usefulness of their functions in those organigrams.

As could be expected, quality management systems, that were shyly incipient in those days, flourished with their help, becoming referential structures to support the quality approaches and strategies of each university.

AUDIT programme for the recognition of the Quality Assurance Systems in higher education was born in 2007, as an outcome of the cooperation between ANECA, AQU Catalunya and ACSUG, and based on previous initiatives developed by each of these agencies. The evaluation standards of the AUDIT programme totally align with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), as can be seen in the attached chart.

It soon became relevant, and all universities, guided by their Quality Units, started to work to adapt themselves to the approaches depicted in the programme, that was initially established in three steps in order for universities to develop their Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS):

- Guidance for the design of the IQAS
- Evaluation of the design of the IQAS
- Certification of the implementation of the IQAS

AUDIT	E.S.G. 2005	E.S.G. 2015
Guideline 1.0. How quality policy and objectives are defined by the centre	1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance	1.1 Quality policy
Guideline 1.1. How the centre assures the quality of its teaching programmes	1.2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards	1.2. Design and approval of the programmes 1.9. Continuous follow-up and check-up of the programmes 1.10. Quality assurance external cycle
Guideline 1.2. How the teaching programmes are student-orientated	1.3. Assessment of students	1.3. Student-based learning process, teaching and evaluation 1.4 Student admittance, progression, recognition and certification
Guideline 1.3. How the centre assures and improves the quality of its teaching staff	1.4. Quality assurance of teaching staff	1.5. Teaching staff
Guideline 1.4. How resources are managed and improved by the centre	1.5. Learning resources and student support	1.6. Learning resources and support for students
Guideline 1.5. How results are analysed and considered by the centre	1.6. Information systems	1.7. Information management
Guideline 1.6. How information about the degrees is published	1.7. Public information	1.8. Public information

Chart 1. Relationship between the guidelines of the AUDIT programme and chapter 1 of the ESG 2005 y 2015

Unibasq joined this programme that very year, establishing the basis for the Basque universities to design, spread out, adapt and develop throughout time a quality assurance system for their centres, universities and/or faculties and colleges, understanding them as a unit responsible for offering structural coverage through services, facilities, teaching staff, assessment, orientation and so on so forth, to guarantee that the teachings of all degree, master´s degree, and doctorate programmes meet the standards and quality criteria of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Unibasq used all available documentation and the evaluation applicative developed by ANECA for the development of this project, consisting on:

Tools for the design:

- Guide for the design of Quality Assurance Systems in higher education
- Guidelines for the design of Quality Assurance Systems in higher education
- Tools for diagnosis

Tools for evaluation:

- Evaluation guide for the design of Quality Assurance Systems in higher education
- ANNEX I. Protocol for the preliminary revision of the submitted documentation
- ANNEX II. Protocol for the evaluation of the design of Quality Assurance Systems in the centres
- ANNEX III. Evaluation Report Model

In the beginning, AUDIT focus specifically in the design of the quality system; the aim was for policies, scope, procedures and evaluation and improvement systems to be useful for the quality strategy of the centre, provided they were also sustainable in time.

Progressively, evaluation criteria were redefined thanks to the external revisions, compromises, extent, and accuracy of the design of the proposals, and their implementation in the centres.

In 2008, following an introduction-training workshop for the universities of the Basque University System (BUS), in which the keys for the design of QAS were discussed, the second phase of the project was launched with a pilot call for the evaluation of the designs of QAS. Up to the present day, all the centres in the BUS have evaluated their QAS. However, due to the re-structuring of the UPV/EHU, a new evaluation of the QAS will be necessary for those centres that have merged, an action that will be carried on 2018-2019.

As far as Unibasq is concerned, AUDIT can be considered a successful experience as it has allowed for the whole of the BUS to witness the implementation and consolidation of their quality systems. Nonetheless, AUDIT may not be considered a static programme: in order for it to meet its objectives, it requires constant changes; it is also subjected to self-evaluation, and consequently, continuous improvement. Changes are not big in size, but they reflect an evolution in progress.

With the imminent launching of the institutional accreditation process, and its later renovation of the accreditation of Bachelor´s and Master's Degrees, AUDIT gained

substantial relevance, constituting the <u>evaluation axis</u> in those processes. It is rather likely that it may require some changes in its working methodology, in this sense.

In spite of not being easy to guess the path of those possible changes, we dare to suggest that some of the questions that may arise somewhere along the debate will be related to the focus of the evaluation, efficiency measures, simplification in the search of core elements, innovation in the methodologies and focus of the teaching activity, and meta-evaluation of the evaluation process; furthermore, a likely inclusion of risk analysis.

Regarding evaluation focus, we believe that the target in structural and process questions will lead to a greater attention to results achieved, measured not in terms of academic achievement, but in the adequacy and level of competence acquired, and thus, in the quality of the employment it may lead to, together with an appraisal of the extent to which focus and methodology have an impact in the results, and whether these results meet the expectations of the degree. Therefore, it may be possible that we observe a customisation of the indicators, beyond those suggested by the agencies, and that in the definition of new measuring units, other agents, external to universities get involved. It is only natural to foresee that this likely change may require certain adaptations for some branches and degrees and establish a differentiation for each of the branches and educational level.

An open debate may be opened on the core criteria; those that have a greater impact in the result of the accreditation, with the intention of simplifying the preparations and later evaluation that AUDIT requires. A reflection should also be made as to whether the evaluation system produces accreditation in rankings – for instance, 3 to 5 levels that differentiate levels of achievement – or continue as it is, following the model of admittance/refusal.

In the study plans, universities are supposed to seek differentiating from one another, and for this purpose, AUDIT requires a space to appraise innovation in teaching methodology and its implementation, together with its impact in the outcome. Those plans for personnel, investment in equipment for teaching and researching, the repercussion and interrelation of the results and lines of investigation in teaching strategies – particularly for Bachelor's and Master's degrees – will, most certainly, find a place in the future of AUDIT. The analysis of the workload of students and the coherence of such load should not be alien to these changes, in occurrence with an efficiency analysis that considers applicant and graduation profiling. Summarising, we are talking about a change in the paradigm that goes from being focused on teaching, to being focused on learning.

The third phase of the programme, corresponding the certification of the implementation of the IQAS, kicked off in 2013 with a pilot call in which two centres took part. It initially developed common documentation for all the part-taking agencies that later got adapted to the different characteristics of each of them.

The updated documentation for the certification of the IQAS may be found in this link, and in the case of Unibasq, contains the following elements:

- Guide for the Certification of the Implementation of Quality Assurance Systems
  - ANNEX I. Application of the implementation of IQAS certificate
  - ANNEX II. Report of the changes introduced in the IQAS documentation
  - ANNEX III. External Evaluation Report
  - ANNEX IV. Improvement actions Plan
  - ANNEX V. Tools for the evaluation of the implementation of the IQAS

The outcomes can be seen in a summary in the following chart:

University		Centres	Design certificate	Implementation Certificate
Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea		13+7 (new)+3[1]	16	6
Universidad de Deusto / Deustuko Univertsitatea		5+1[1]	6	5 + 1[2]
Mondragon Unibertsitatea		4	4	3 +1[2]

[1] Associated Centres.

[2] implementation certificate report pending (April-May 2018).

Additionally, since 2016, and thanks to the collaboration agreement between Unibasq and Euskalit, it is possible to carry out a joint evaluation of the implementation of IQAS

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in the centres for the Advanced Management Model (AMM) of Euskalit and Unibasq's AUDIT programme, favouring the attainment of both the hallmarks or certifications in a single visit. Two centres from UPV/EHU have taken part in this initiative from the beginning, obtaining in addition to the AUDIT certification, the Silver A from Euskalit (Science and Technology Faculty, and Engineering School Vitoria-Gasteiz UPV/EHU).

Between 2013 and 2017, amongst the certifications of the implementation of the QAS carried out, certain strengths can be systematically found in the Basque University System:

1. Quality Culture
2. Use of the computer applications that procure monitorisation of Leadership processes
3. Methodology or systematisation for the follow-up of the implementation
4. Personnel chosen for the implementation of the system

As good practices or individual strengths of the centres we could highlight:

1. In Universidad de Deusto, systematic internal audits
2. In Mondragon Unibertsitatea, high degree of participation of both companies and alumni in decision-making, and the involvement of stakeholders
3. In UPV/EHU, the communication plan and the sources of information about learning outcomes, labour integration, and degree of satisfaction of stakeholders, have been positively evaluated.

With regards to the improvement points that can be found throughout the years in most of the centres, we could underline:

1. Boosting the participation of stakeholders, particularly alumni, Teaching Staff, and Administration and Service Staff.
2. Increasing and measuring the effectiveness of communication channels, both internal, and external.
3. Development of communication plans.

The three universities in the system provide an annual Management Report that summarises the revision of their IQAS and includes their actions for improvement and outcomes achieved.

This document is used in the follow-up of the IQAS, both for the monitorisation of degrees, and the renovation of the accreditation.

As a final thought, we would like to say that the transparency measures that have been extended to the public administration may also reach AUDIT, what would lead to the

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inclusion of criteria concerning social responsibility – for instance, academic fraud control, environment protection, efficient management of economic resources, etc – together with a need to develop criteria for meta-evaluation that enable a transformation of AUDIT from the point of view of quality, to that of continuous improvement.

Unibasq's AUDIT Committee, April 2018.