



**UNIBASQ
SELF-
ASSESSMENT
REPORT
2018**

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Acronyms

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| AAC-DEVA | Agencia Andaluza del Conocimiento (Direction of Evaluation and Accreditation Andalusian Knowledge Agency) |
| ACCUEE | Agencia Canaria de Calidad Universitaria y Evaluación Educativa (Agency for the Evaluation of Education and University Quality of the Canary Islands) |
| ACPUA | Agencia de Calidad y Prospectiva Universitaria de Aragón (agency for the evaluation of higher education in the region of Aragon) |
| ACSUCYL | Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León) |
| ACSUG | Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia (<i>Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System</i>) |
| AMP | Annual Management Plan |
| ANECA | Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain) |
| AQAS | Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen (Agency for Quality Assurance) |
| AQU | <i>Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya</i> (The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency) |
| AQUIB | L'Agència de Qualitat Universitària de les Illes Balears (Agency for University Quality of the Balearic Islands) |
| AUDIT | Internal Quality Assurance Systems audits |
| AVAP | La Agència Valenciana d'Avaluació i Prospectiva (Evaluation and Prospection Agency for Valencia) |
| BUS | Basque University System |
| CGPU | General Conference on University Policy |
| CTI | Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur |
| CU | Council of Universities |
| CURSA | University Committee for Regulating Follow-up and Accreditation |
| DEQAR | Database of External Quality Assurance Results |
| DOCENTIA | Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions' teaching quality assessment systems |
| ECA | European Consortium for Accreditation |
| ECTS | Sistema Europeo de Transferencia y Acumulación de Créditos (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) |
| EHEA | European Higher Education Area |
| ENIC-NARICs | European Network of Information Centres in the European Region- National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union |
| ENQA | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| EQA | External Quality Assurance |
| EQAR | European Quality Assurance Register for Higher |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| EQUIP | Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice in European higher education |
| ESG | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area |
| FIBAA | Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation |
| FM+D | Fundación Madri+d |
| FP | Formación Profesional (Vocational training) |
| HCERES | High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education |
| HEIs | higher education institutions |
| ImpEA | Facilitating implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programme |
| INQAAHE | International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education |
| IQAS | Internal Quality Assurance Systems |
| LIREQA | Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance |
| LOMLOU | Ley Orgánica de Universidades Modificada (Organic Law of Universities Modified) |
| LOU | Ley Orgánica de Universidades (Organic Law of Universities) |
| MoU | Memoranda of Understanding |
| PKA | Polish Accreditation Committee |
| QA | Quality assurance |
| REACU | The Spanish Network for Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies |
| RUCT | Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees |
| SAR | Self Assessment Report |
| SMEs | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UPV/EHU | Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (University of the Basque Country) |

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1 Introduction

This self-assessment report (SAR) aims to show the evolution of Unibasq since the last review in 2014 and its compliance with the new Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). The previous SAR dates from November 2013 while the site-visit of the review panel took place in February 2014. After the positive outcome of the first review, Unibasq was accepted as full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in September 2014 and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in November 2014. As a result, the Agency experienced a series of changes to adapt to this new situation:

- new legal competencies were achieved, in order to comply with the requirements of the Spanish legislation, which led to the development of new activities;
- a new strategic plan was adopted in order to include the new challenges, respond to the recommendations of the previous review and put more emphasis on internationalisation;
- a new funding scheme based on a programme-contract signed with the Basque government came into place in 2016.

At Unibasq the new version of the ESG fostered a broad reflection process taking into account its impact on the different External Quality Assurance (EQA) procedures performed by the agency, in order to ensure their proper alignment with the content and spirit of the new ESG.

2 Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

The self-assessment process started with a review of the previous evaluation report and the follow-up report sent to ENQA in 2016, in parallel with a compilation of information about Unibasq's activities since 2013-2014, a careful reading of the ENQA and EQAR guides and a detailed comparative analysis of the ESG 2015 and 2005 on the basis of the EQUIP (Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice in European higher education) project. This last part was complemented with the participation of Unibasq in the EQUIP focus group for quality assurance agencies held in Oslo in May 2017.

As agreed in the Terms of Reference (ToR) with ENQA and EQAR, the scope of this self-assessment process focuses mainly on the procedures for programme and institutional evaluation:

- Study programmes review procedures
 - Ex-ante accreditation (called “verification” in Spain)
 - Follow-up reports
 - Modifications to “verified” programmes
 - (Ex-post) accreditation (called “renewal of the accreditation” in Spain)
- Institutional review procedures
 - AUDIT (Internal Quality Assurance Systems audits)
 - DOCENTIA (Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions' teaching quality assessment systems).

In order to take into account all different views expressed during the development of the SAR, Unibasq involved its entire operational staff, with fluid communication thanks to several coordination meetings, and set up a specific working group with the following composition:

- Unibasq's management and international officers;
- Representatives from the agency's Governing Council, Advisory Board and Students' Consultative Committee;
- An EQA expert from the German quality assurance agency AQAS (Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen) with experience in external reviews of Quality Assurance agencies.

The first draft document was discussed in a meeting of the working group in May 2018. The next steps were:

1. Presentation to the Advisory Board.
2. Comments from staff and stakeholders.
3. Second meeting of the working group (June 2018).
4. Presentation for approval to the Advisory Board and Governing Council in July 2018.

3 Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

3.1 Legal basis

The legal framework which regulates the university policy in Spain has its origin in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and its article 27, which recognises university autonomy.

The Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) of 21st December 2001, amended by Organic Law 4/2007 (LOMLOU) of 12th April 2007, sets out the basic regulations on a national scale establishing the respective powers and competencies of universities, the national government and the governments of the different Autonomous Regions.

Together with the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country (1979), this legislation states that university policy is mainly the responsibility of the Autonomous Regions, which are responsible for the authorisation, modification and termination of official study programmes.

The main rules for the development of higher education in the Basque Country were laid down in the regional Law 3/2004 of 25 February 2004 dealing with the Basque University System. This system is defined as consisting of all universities established in the Basque Country. The Law provides details about the objectives and underlying principles of the system; it also deals with universities' teaching and research activities; it defines the university community as consisting of the student body, teaching and research staff, and administrative and service staff. It refers to the legal status, academic and corporate governance and quality assurance of universities, it regulates certain economic aspects and the system of funding for the public university and it provides for the creation of the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System.

In Spain, the external Quality Assurance in higher education is currently provided through eleven Quality Assurance Agencies. Eight of which are full members of ENQA and EQAR (ANECA, AQU-Catalunya in Catalonia, ACSUG in Galicia, ACSUCYL in Castilla y León, AAC-DEVA in Andalusia, FM+D in Madrid, ACPUA in Aragón and Unibasq in the Basque Country). The other three regional Quality Assurance Agencies (those that are not full members of ENQA and EQAR) are AQUIB in the Balearic Islands, ACCUEE in the Canary Islands and AVAP in the region of Valencia.

In order to coordinate the external quality assurance activities throughout the Spanish University System a number of bodies and tools have been created:

a) The Council of Universities (CU) exercises advisory, cooperation and coordination functions. The CU is formed by the Minister in charge of universities, and the Rectors of public and private universities. Among other functions, current applicable laws grant this Council the power to decide about the ex-ante and ex-post accreditation and to approve changes in official

study programmes¹, on the basis of the binding evaluation reports submitted by the Quality Assurance Agencies.

b) The General Conference on University Policy (CGPU) is the body responsible for developing and coordinating the country's general university policy. It is composed of the Spanish Ministry and the Regional Ministers in charge of universities in the different Autonomous Regions. This body establishes and assesses the general lines of university policy and approves the criteria for the coordination of evaluation, certification and accreditation activities.

c) The Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in higher education (REACU), founded in 2006. All Spanish QA agencies are part of this network. REACU was created to coordinate their activities and promote closer collaboration between them. It does not have any official standing but allows the agencies to comply with the regulation, which requires them to apply similar assessment procedures. Unibasq has been an active – and proactive - member of the REACU network since its creation.

d) The University Committee for the Regulation of the Follow-up Procedures and Accreditation (CURSA), created in 2010 to guarantee the coordination of the evaluation processes linked to the follow-up and accreditation of official study programmes. Participants on this committee are representatives of the Ministry, some Regional Governments, some Quality Agencies and some universities.

¹ Official university study programmes in Spain are the ones that undergo an ex-ante accreditation and are formally “authorised” in the Autonomous Region where they are offered; these programmes are listed on the national register of accredited programmes (Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT)) and lead to a qualification that has administrative value “all over the Spanish territory”. In addition to these official programmes, HEIs in Spain can offer programmes which lead to a certificate or diploma awarded by the university itself, not by the State. These programmes are known in Spanish as “Títulos propios” and do not have to undergo a compulsory external review.

3.2 The Basque University System

The Basque Country (Euskadi in the Basque language) is one of Spain's Autonomous Regions, comprising 3 provinces located in the North of Spain. It has a strong linguistic and cultural identity of its own, with a population of about 2,176,000 inhabitants and an area of 7,234 km², it has a density of 301 persons per km².



Figure 1. Location of the Basque Country within Europe.

The Basque Country is among the Spanish Autonomous Regions with the highest income per capita, thanks to its traditions of entrepreneurship and solid professional training and its highly diversified economy, based on a strong network of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

As a result, the Basque Education System is very close to the needs of the Basque Country, with strong local roots in industry and society. One of the main features of the Basque education system, besides the proximity of schools to pupils, is that students have the choice to carry out their studies in the Basque and Spanish languages and a foreign language that includes English and some other languages.

The Basque University System is built on a well-established tradition of education and training. It comprises three multi-campus higher education institutions that all have their main seat in the Basque territory. Each of them features a different kind of ownership:

- Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU) is the only public university in the Basque Country; it operates as a single university “system”, with three campuses located in each of the three provinces of the Basque Country: Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba.
- The Universidad de Deusto (Deusto University) is a private, non-profit HEI of the

Society of Jesus (Jesuits). It has two campuses in the Basque Country: in Bilbao and San Sebastian, and a Business School division in Madrid.

- Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Mondragon University) is a private, non-profit HEI that is organised as a cooperatively owned entity created in 1997 by means of the merger of previously existing education and training institutes.

Table 1. Composition of the Basque University System.

| University | Year of creation of its first centre | Year of creation | Kind | Faculties/ Schools |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea | 1739 | 1980 | Public | 20 (3) |
| Universidad de Deusto | 1881 | 1886 | Private, not-for-profit, Church | 5 (1) |
| Mondragon Unibertsitatea | 1943 | 1997 | Private, not-for-profit, cooperative | 4 |

* Between brackets "Affiliated centres/schools".

This diversity in ownership and underlying philosophies gives the Basque University System a unique personality, based on a mixture of cooperation and competition between 3 institutions that are all firmly committed to their role in Basque society and economy. The diversified Basque system has for a long time enjoyed a good reputation in Spain, both in teaching and research. In fact, in the Eurostat regional yearbook 2017, the data about "Persons aged 30-34 with tertiary education attainment"² clearly shows that the Basque Country is one of the regions in Europe with the highest average, >50%.

In the Basque Country and in Spain in general, higher education comprises University Education, Advanced Vocational Training (FP) and Special Regime Education such as Advanced Artistic Education, Vocational Training in the Plastic Arts and Design and Advanced Sports Education. There are no Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of the *Polytechnic* or *Fachhochschule* type. The mandate of the Spanish Quality Assurance agencies is mainly limited to evaluating universities and their programmes and part of the Advanced Artistic Education.

The current structure of official university degrees, since its alignment with the EHEA, is shown in the following picture:

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Education_and_training_statistics_at_regional_level#Europe_2020:_tertiary_educational_attainment

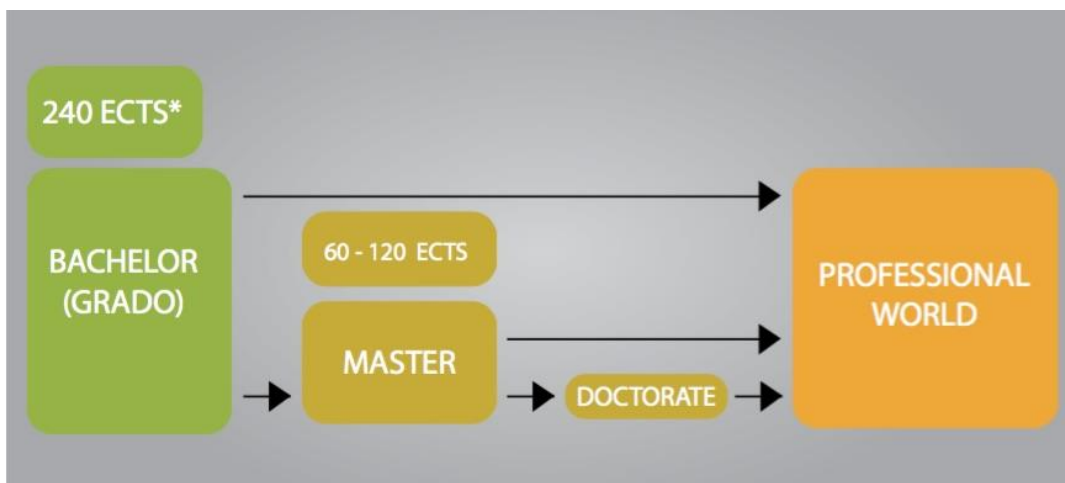


Figure 2. Official study programme organization in Spain.

The general rule is that the duration* of Bachelor degrees (“Grados” in Spanish) is 240 ECTS, even though 180 ECTS degrees are allowed in some areas and there are specific degrees such as Medicine with 330 ECTS.

The study programmes offered by the Basque University System cover all academic fields, all levels and all types of programmes. Table 2 offers information about the study programmes offered by each of the 3 universities in the Basque Country, which have already passed the ex-ante accreditation process.

Table 2. Official study programmes at Basque universities (2017-2018).

| Number of study programmes | Bachelor | Master | Doctorate | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------|-----------|-------|
| UPV/EHU | 68 | 109 | 65 | 242 |
| University of Deusto | 22 | 32 | 7 | 61 |
| Mondragon University | 15 | 15 | 3 | 33 |
| TOTAL | 105 | 156 | 75 | 336 |

Source: Universities’ official data.

In the 2017-2018 academic year around 58.000 students were enrolled at Basque universities; 74% of them were enrolled at the public University of the Basque Country.

For mainly demographic reasons, the university system in Spain has experienced a substantial decrease in the number of students enrolled in recent years. This has also happened in the Basque Country, with a drop of around 3,000 students since 2011/2012.

Table 3 gives more detailed information about the number of students enrolled at Basque universities.

Table 3. Number of students in Higher Education Institutions in the Basque Country (2017-2018).

| University | Bachelor | Master | Doctorate | TOTAL |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| UPV/EHU | 35492 | 3325 | 3570 | 42387 |
| University of Deusto | 8643 | 1498 | 347 | 10488 |
| Mondragon University | 4087 | 577 | 140 | 4804 |
| TOTAL | 48222 | 5400 | 4057 | 57679 |

Source: Universities' official data.

Regarding academic staff, the main body of academic staff in Spain are civil servants and full-time professors/researchers. Universities also employ professors/lecturers on a contractual full-time or part time basis. This type of staff needs to be previously evaluated and "accredited" either by the national Quality Assurance Agency (ANECA) or by their regional QA agency. In the Basque Country the evaluation and accreditation of the different categories of academic and research staff is one of the core assignments of Unibasq.

There were 6869 lecturers and researchers in the Basque university system in the academic year 2017-2018, 82% of them at the public University of the Basque Country. Table 4 shows the global data of lecturers and researchers of each university.

Table 4. Total number of lecturers and researchers in Higher Education Institutions in the Basque Country. (2017-2018).

| University | TOTAL |
|----------------------|-------------|
| UPV/EHU | 5663 |
| University of Deusto | 770 |
| Mondragon University | 436 |
| TOTAL | 6869 |

Source: Universities' official data.

More information about the Basque University System is available from Unibasq's [Observatory of the Activity of the Basque University System](#), a website where Unibasq gathers data about the academic programmes and performance indicators of the three universities in the system.

4 History, profile and activities of the agency

4.1 Legal status

Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System – is a public entity governed by private law (which gives it more administrative and financial autonomy) and accountable to the Basque Government department in charge of universities.

Unibasq’s mission is to help improving the Basque University System by promoting quality for the benefit of the various stakeholders involved in higher education, as is stated in its [Strategic Plan](#) (Annex 1).

Its purpose is the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System, in accordance with Spanish and international standards. It may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities outside the Basque Autonomous Community based on prior agreements signed with relevant external entities.

To achieve this, Unibasq carries out primarily activities that:

- *Contribute to improving the quality of the Basque University System, in the aspects of teaching or learning, research and management;*
- *Provide information and opinions to public administrations and universities in their decision-making processes;*
- *Offer information to society on the work and results of the Basque University System.*

The Agency was created under the name “Agency of Quality Evaluation and Accreditation of the Basque University System” (under Article 79 of Law 3/2004 on the Basque University System) and was first called “Uniquial”. On 4 April 2005 its first Governing Board was set up, which approved the Agency’s statutes on 1 June 2006. In the year 2009 a process of change was started on the initiative of the Agency with a view to adapting its statutes and operations to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Because of this extensive process, the Agency’s Statutes were changed (in January 2011) and the new name of Unibasq was adopted. However, this search for European compatibility made it clear that only a new law could introduce all the necessary changes and guarantee the Agency’s status as an independent, professional entity. This major leap forward was made possible in 2012 thanks to the adoption of the Basque Country Act governing Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System (Law 13/2012 of 28 June 2012- Annex 2). Under the umbrella of this new Law the Agency itself developed its new Statutes that were approved by the Basque Government in May 2013. Unibasq underwent its first external review coordinated by ENQA in 2014.

According to its new (current) statutes, Unibasq undertakes the following types of activities:

- a) Evaluation of university study programmes;

- b) Institutional evaluation and certification;
- c) Accreditation of studies and competencies within the European Qualifications Framework;
- d) Evaluation and accreditation of academic staff's research and teaching activities;
- e) Evaluation of the individual research merits of academic staff, for the purpose of allocating them additional remuneration, within the framework of the research objectives set by the Basque Government;
- f) Evaluation of universities' research activities;
- g) Elaboration of studies for the improvement and innovation of evaluation, certification and accreditation models;
- h) Promotion of the evaluation and comparison of quality criteria within the European and international context;
- i) Advice to government on matters regarding the quality of the Basque University System;
- j) Any other matter related to the Agency's purpose and area of activity, either at the Agency's own initiative or upon request by the governmental department responsible for universities.

The agency may establish relations involving cooperation, collaboration, the recognition of evaluation, accreditation and certification procedures and the exchange of information with other regional, national or foreign agencies that are responsible for quality evaluation, accreditation or certification in higher education.

Unibasq may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities at HEIs outside the Basque Autonomous Region on the basis of prior agreements signed with other regional, national or foreign agencies, universities or educational authorities. A first instance of such activity outside the Basque Country started recently, when Unibasq signed an agreement with the University of Aconcagua in Chile, with whom a pilot review of their Bachelor degree in Law is planned for the end of 2018 (more information about this can be found in section 7 of the present SAR (Agency's international activities)).

The Agency may also take part in the evaluation of other activities and agents within the Basque system of Science, Technology and Innovation, and may also perform similar functions outside the Basque Autonomous Community, on the basis of prior agreements signed with other regional, national or foreign agencies, universities or authorities. In this sense, Unibasq signed a collaboration agreement in 2017 with Ikerbasque - Basque Foundation for Science – in order to organise events and activities or elaborate reports regarding research and scientific knowledge transference and diffusion.

In the following table data concerning the activities performed during the last five years is summarized.

Table 5. Evaluation data of the different procedures 2013 - June 2018.

| | STUDY PROGRAMMES | | | | CERTIFICATES AND DIPLOMAS | INSTITUTIONS | | ACADEMIC STAFF | | |
|------|------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|----------|
| | EX-ANTE | FOLLOW-UP | MODIFICATION | EX-POST | TÍTULOS PRO-PIOS | AUDIT | DOCENTIA* | ACCREDITATION | PERFORMANCE | RESEARCH |
| 2013 | 85 | 96 | -- | -- | 5 | 2 | 1 | 526 | -- | 160 |
| 2014 | 18 | 39 | -- | 67 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 510 | -- | 131 |
| 2015 | 10 | -- | 38 | 70 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 273 | 1883 | 86 |
| 2016 | 8 | 33 | 13 | 38 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 644 | 1228 | 86 |
| 2017 | 6 | 76 | 17 | 69 | 11 | 3 | 1 | 649 | 1299 | 117 |
| 2018 | 5 | 66 | 6 | 15 | 23 | 2 | 1 | 734 | -- | -- |

Besides all these evaluation activities, Unibasq performs some other activities regarding the enhancement of the Basque University System, as the organization of different symposia, workshops, summer courses which deal with “hot” topics and provide relevant information that can help Basque Universities improve their quality and their quality enhancement instruments (see Section 8.4) and the publication of different documents (annual reports of activities, meta-evaluation reports, monographic reports, workshop reviews...) to provide information to the general public regarding our activities and our field of activity. Moreover, the development of the Observatory of the Activity of the Basque University System (Unibasq Behatokia) has provided stakeholders and the society as a whole a tool to find important documentation (memos, monitoring reports, accreditation renewal reports, etc.) about each one of the qualifications (Bachelor’s Degrees, Master’s Degrees and Doctorates) taught by the Basque University System, as well as quantitative indicators. In addition, Unibasq participates in different conferences where it shares its activities and methodologies.

4.2 Structure of Unibasq

a. The Governing Board and the Director.

In the Act governing Unibasq ([Act 13/2012](#)), the composition of the Governing Board is defined. It must include representatives from the Basque Government, the rectors of the three Basque universities, one student (who must be elected by the specific body for the participation of Basque university students), another person with recognized academic prestige, and six persons appointed by the Basque University Council (three of them working outside the Basque Autonomous Region, one of whom at least must work outside Spain and two must work outside the university community). Currently the members of the Governing Board are:

Table 6. Governing Board composition (Creation date: 2012).

| Government representatives | University rectors | Academics | Students | Professionals | International |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|---------------|
| 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

The Governing Board is responsible for the governance of the agency in strategic and structural terms. The approval of its strategic and annual management plans, the agency's preliminary budget plan and the programme-contract are its main functions.

It meets periodically, at least twice a year.

The Director is responsible for the management of the Agency in all areas of activity and the representation of the Agency in the outside world, including media and the university community.

b. The Advisory Board.

The members of the Advisory Board are the Agency's Director, who chairs it, and ten persons with a proven track record in academia or quality assurance, appointed by the Agency's director. The majority of members of this Board must be from outside the Basque University System. The Advisory Board must include at least one student, and three of its members must carry out their work outside Spain. Through its composition and the expertise of its members, the Advisory Board ensures the quality and credibility of the Agency's activities, in particular by means of the following activities:

- a) Advice to the Governing Board and the Director on the performance of their functions;
- b) Development and approval of all the evaluation procedures and criteria to be used by the Agency. Procedures must be rigorous, clear and public, and criteria must be objective, public and comparable to those used elsewhere in the European Higher Education Area;
- c) Submission of proposals to the Director of the agency for the appointment and -where appropriate - the dismissal of members of the Evaluation Committees;
- d) Safeguard of the impartiality and objectivity of the evaluation, accreditation and certification procedures;
- e) Any other function assigned to it by Act 13/2012 or related to the evaluation procedures but not explicitly assigned to another body of the Agency.

Table 7. Current Advisory Board composition (Creation date: 2012).

| Basque University System (BUS) | Spanish academics outside the BUS | Students | International experts |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |

The Advisory Board usually meets every three or four months.

- c. **The Evaluation Committees** are the scientific/technical bodies through which the Agency performs its evaluation, accreditation and certification functions. Each Evaluation Committee is made up of the following:

– Academics with a proven track record. A fundamental rule at Unibasq is that each Committee must include a majority of academics from outside the Basque University System (as an internal Unibasq policy at least one international expert);

– Students from the disciplinary/professional areas to be assessed, in the evaluation of all programmes and activities that may have a direct impact on students (i.e. not for the evaluation of individual professors for their accreditation, the validation of their research or their rights to a bonus payment); student members are appointed by the specific body for the participation of Basque university students. This entity, created as the Basque University Students' Advisory Board by Decree 161/2012, is intended to give advice in order to guarantee the rights and duties of the students of the Basque University System. It is made up of students from the three universities of the Basque University System and representatives of the Basque Government department responsible for universities;

– Professionals with a proven track record in the knowledge area to be evaluated, in all the procedures for the evaluation of study programmes.

Unibasq 13/2012 Law states that *“the agency shall ensure that both official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community are used in its external relations. The right of natural persons and legal entities to be attended in Euskera (the Basque language) as well as in Spanish shall be guaranteed in their oral and written communications with the agency.”* This is an important challenge for the agency since most experts must come from outside of the Basque University System. In order to overcome this, Unibasq usually tries to find Basque speakers in the neighbouring regions (French Basque Country and Navarra) or Basque speakers abroad.

In order to carry out these evaluation activities the Agency has set up Evaluation Committees in the following areas:

- Study programmes (by knowledge field)
- AUDIT
- DOCENTIA
- Accreditation of academic staff
- Evaluation of the performance (teaching, research and management) of the academic staff
- New Committees (labels, university recognition, ...)

Table 8. Current Evaluation Committees composition.

| Committee | Academics | Students | Professional | International | Creation date |
|---|-----------|----------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Study programmes* | 26 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2012 |
| AUDIT | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2008 |
| DOCENTIA | 2 | 1 | -- | 1 | 2017** |
| Labels | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2018 |
| University recognition | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2018 |
| Accreditation of academic staff*** | 38 | -- | -- | 2 | 2008 |
| Academic staff performance review*** | 40 | -- | -- | 1 | 2007 |

* 5 committees by knowledge field. All academics in these committees are from outside the Basque University System. Currently 3 international experts appointed, 2 pending appointment.

** Own Committee since 2017, before 2017 shared committee with ANECA.

*** All of the experts in academic staff evaluation are academics.

In addition to governing and technical bodies, Unibasq has some other bodies.

- d. **Ethics and Guarantees Committee.** Regarding one of the recommendations of the previous review and in order to further improve its appeals procedure, Unibasq has invested much time and effort in reviewing the former Code of ethics (2012) and defining and eventually adopting in 2016 a [Code of Ethics and Guarantees](#) and setting up an [Ethics and Guarantees Committee](#). The Committee evolved from just being the Ethics Committee to supervising the correct implementation of Unibasq's evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures and the correct application of its Ethics and Guarantees code. In addition, this Committee could declare evaluations null and the evaluations would have to be made again, although this Committee does not have reassessment capacity. The reasons why evaluations could be declared null are if the Committee sees risk of impartiality of some expert or if during the procedure some defence right is broken. It meets periodically, at least twice a year.
- e. **Consultative Students Committee** for student involvement: In order to enhance student participation, Unibasq has set up the Consultative Students Committee made up of the students who are part of the Governing Board, Advisory Board and of some of the Evaluation Committees. This Committee started working in 2015 with a view to widening and systemising the participation of students in Unibasq's review activities and advising the Agency on projects with a direct impact on the student body, like training activities for students regarding quality assurance in Higher Education.
- f. **Internal staff bodies.** The Quality Committee meets periodically in order to ensure the correct implementation of the Quality Handbook and procedures (See Section 6 for further information). Additionally, Unibasq has internal Committees for Equality and for the promotion of the use of the Basque language. The Committee for Equality was created in 2017, with goals for that year that included writing a plan for equality that had axes such as training, family reconciliation, use of non-sexist language and the inclusion of gender perspective in degree evaluation processes. The Committee for the promotion of the use of the Basque language was set in 2014 with the intention of boosting the use of the Basque language in all the activities of the Agency. For this

purpose, a protocol for the use of Basque in the communications of the Agency was made. As an outcome, Unibasq received the Bikain certification for Quality in the use of the Basque language in 2017, an award that is handed in by the Basque Government.

g. Unibasq staff. The staff of the Agency has been sufficient, in terms of numbers and level of qualification, for the Agency to carry out its tasks in a satisfactory way since its creation. The Agency also provides training opportunities for its staff. These aspects are described in more detail in Section 8.5., which deals with the ESG 3.5. (Resources). The Agency's operational structure functions through the meetings of the different staff and bodies mentioned, mainly by means of coordination and programme meetings:

- Coordination meetings.
 - General coordination meetings. All staff members attend these meetings which are held periodically. The purpose of these meetings is to share information regarding the Agency and its activities.
 - Coordinators' meetings. The coordinators of the different areas meet every week in order to better develop the procedures, coordinate and share the work load, if necessary.
- Programme meetings. These meetings are mainly technical and their purpose is to ensure the correct implementation of the evaluation procedures. These meetings are held before and after an evaluation procedure is set up.

5 Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency. Processes and their methodologies

This section provides an analysis of the procedures conducted by the agency, grouped according to the type of evaluation carried out: study programme evaluation and institutional evaluation. Other evaluation activities performed by Unibasq, including evaluation of academic staff, are also described. The role of external experts can be found in the documentation corresponding to each procedure. The information regarding the selection process (Annex 3) is published together with the link to our [database of experts](#). As stated in some other sections, Unibasq organises specific trainings for students and international experts.

PROCEDURES FOR THE EVALUATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES

Official university study programmes must undergo an external evaluation process conducted by Unibasq in several stages; the first stage, prior to implementation of the study programme (Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Doctorate studies) consists of an ex-ante "accreditation" of the proposal; this means mainly that the university may offer the programme and it leads to an official qualification. After the start of the implementation of the study programme, in the second stage, Unibasq carries out a follow up procedure. In the third stage, once the study programme has been fully implemented, it must undergo a cyclical ex-post accreditation procedure in order to maintain its status as an official study programme (accreditation ex-post), after 4 years for Master's Degrees and 6 years for most Bachelor's Degrees (7-8 years for those carrying 300-330 ECTS respectively) and for Doctorate programmes.

Ex-ante accreditation ("verification"): A positive evaluation by Unibasq is required before the Basque government may approve a new official programme; this local requirement comes in addition to the national requirement that all new programmes need a positive ex-ante evaluation before they can become "official" (accredited), i.e. with validity throughout the Spanish territory and enter the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT) (since 2006 for the authorisation phase and since 2014 for the whole ex-ante accreditation process); Unibasq has reviewed the study programmes for the Basque government approval and after its ENQA positive evaluation in 2014, Unibasq achieved the competences for the delivery of the ex-ante accreditation reports. Unibasq evaluates the proposed study plan (Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Doctorate) designed in line with the European Higher Education Area. All study plans, before their implementation, must undergo an ex-ante evaluation to ensure, a priori, the coherence of the proposed course of study, and the availability of sufficient human and material resources, responding to the following criteria in line with the Royal Decree 1393/2007, and subsequent updates, and the Basque Decree 274/2017:

1. Name and description of the degree.
2. Justification for the degree.

3. Expected learning outcomes.
4. Student access and admission.
5. Programme content.
6. Academic staff.
7. Material resources and services.
8. Intended outcomes.
9. Internal Quality Assurance System.
10. Timetable for implementation.
11. Economic report, including incomes, expenses and investments related with the degree.

The Agency's corresponding Study Programmes Evaluation Committee (by field: Sciences, Health Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Arts and Humanities, and Social Sciences and Law) conducts the evaluation of the degree proposal submitted by the University. This is a desk-based review and the corresponding Committee issues an ex-ante accreditation report regarding the fulfilment of the legal requirements and the abovementioned criteria, which is binding in nature, and includes, as applicable, recommendations to be analysed during the follow-up procedure.

Unibasq has drawn up guidelines to support universities in presenting their official study programme proposals and has developed evaluation procedures (called "protocolos" in Spanish) to assist the evaluation committees.

All the information regarding this procedure can be found in the following link:

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-verification-authorisation/>

In addition to the regular procedure, since the end of 2017 the universities in the Basque Country can ask for the:

- **Recognition of dual learning**, learning system that combines learning at university and at a working environment. This is a review additional to the regular ex-ante accreditation procedure. The objective of this programme is to evaluate the Bachelor's and Master's Degree study programmes' proposals to obtain recognition of "Dual Learning". The aforesaid recognition may extend throughout the whole study programme, or a part of it. All degrees in the Basque University System registered in the Registry for Universities, Centres, and Degrees (RUCT) may apply for this recognition. This is part of a new initiative included in the new Basque Decree 274/2017 of December 19th, regarding the implementation and closure of official study programmes (Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees and Doctoral Studies) where it is established that the Basque official study programmes will be classified in different levels under these categories: 1. Innovative methodologies based training; 2. Internationalisation; and 3. Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations. Unibasq has already developed the methodology for reviewing "Dual

learning”, linked to the last of the categories “Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations”. Unibasq is the first agency in Spain to review this kind of teaching and learning activities following the models in place in Germany, France and Norway. This initiative has been presented in different fora (ENQA General Assembly 2017 and FECIES fora 2017 and 2018) and has fostered international cooperation in this field. Regarding this, a project proposal called “Quality assurance enhancing confidence in work-based learning” was presented at the KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, KA203 - Strategic Partnerships for higher education 2018 Erasmus+ call (for more information see Section 7).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-dual/>

Review of changes in official programmes (Modifications review since 2014, after ENQA’s positive evaluation): In this context, a university may request, if necessary, some significant change to a previously accredited programme. In this case the Agency’s corresponding Study Programmes Evaluation Committee delivers a report regarding the coherence of the modification proposed, as in the previous case this is a desk-based review taking into account the criteria mentioned in the ex-ante accreditation. In order to make this communication less burdensome, universities may communicate these changes at their annual follow-up reports.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-modification/>

The **follow-up/monitoring** of the implementation of all official study programmes of the Basque University System (since 2013). Once the study programmes listed at the RUCT are implemented, Unibasq monitors their compliance with the project laid down in the validated study plans. This procedure aims to provide universities with an external review of their practical implementation with a view to further enhance them and to prepare the following stage (i.e. the ex-post accreditation procedure).

In more concrete terms, this procedure aims to:

- Ensure that programmes are delivered as initially projected, together with the modifications favourably received and authorised, as appropriate, by the Regional Governments.
- Ensure the public availability of relevant information for the stakeholders.
- Detect any possible deficiencies in the effective delivery of the study programme, and to analyse any actions taken.
- Make recommendations and/or suggestions for improvement during the implementation stages of the study plan.
- Identify good practices for their dissemination.

This is a desk-based review taking into account the same criteria as in the ex-post accreditation procedure:

1. Organization and development of activities

2. Information and transparency
3. Internal Quality Assurance System
4. Academic staff
5. Infrastructure and services
6. Learning outcomes
7. Performance and satisfaction indicators

The “Information and transparency” aspect is specifically reviewed by a student and the one regarding “Internal Quality Assurance System” is reviewed by the AUDIT Committee. The rest of the criteria are reviewed by academic experts. Afterwards the corresponding Study Programmes Evaluation Committee delivers a report.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-monitoring/>

Finally, the **ex-post accreditation procedure (also called procedure for the “renewal” of the accreditation)**, which started in 2014, consists mainly in guaranteeing that official study programmes are actually being delivered at the level of quality that was initially promised.

Concretely, the general objectives are:

- To assure the quality of the programme offered taking into account the legal regulations. One of the items to be assessed is the quality of the outcomes of the study programmes.
- To guarantee that the study programme is delivered according to the latest accredited version of the proposal, that it is conducted with the appropriate resources and supported by an internal quality assurance system that enables reflection and effective improvements to be incorporated.
- To guarantee that the study programme has undergone an appropriate follow-up process, both internal and external, and that the available quantitative and qualitative information has been used to analyse its performance and to generate the pertinent actions for improvement.
- To ensure the availability and accessibility of public relevant information that may be useful to users’ and agents’ decision-making or of interest to the University System.
- To provide recommendations and/or suggestions, for improving the study programme, that support the internal processes for enhancing the quality of the programme and its delivery.

In this procedure, there is a review by a panel including a site-visit to the university taking into account the criteria already mentioned at the follow-up procedure. Afterwards the corresponding Study Programmes Evaluation Committee delivers a binding report so the University Council can issue its decision for the renewal of the accreditation of the programme.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-accreditation-renewal/>

PROCEDURES FOR INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

Unibasq performs two types of institutional evaluation procedures, which are voluntary for the institutions, with the aim of developing a quality culture within institutions.

DOCENTIA. Guaranteeing the level and competence of the teaching staff is the responsibility of the universities and, therefore, these must apply procedures for appraising the performance of teaching and researching staff, and training and motivation programmes to ensure their teaching qualifications and skills.

In 2007, in support of academic staff evaluation, ANECA and the regional agencies, including Unibasq, set in motion a new programme, called DOCENTIA, aimed at supporting universities in designing their own mechanisms for the management of the quality of the activities of their teaching staff and in boosting staff development and recognition. The dimensions reviewed are:

1. Strategic (aims of the academic staff evaluation)
2. Methodological (procedure for the academic staff evaluation, evaluation criteria, information sources, evaluation committees)
3. Outcomes, review and improvement (Outcomes, evaluation reports, consequences of the evaluation)

Currently, the three universities of the Basque University System participate in DOCENTIA throughout its various stages: Design of the Assessment Handbooks, External Assessment of the Designs (desk-based review of the evaluation model proposed by the institution), Implementation and Follow-Up (desk-based review of the implementation phase) and Certification (including a site visit to the institution).

As stated before at section 4.3, since 2017 Unibasq has created its own DOCENTIA Committee taking into account that there is a clear evolution and interest of the three universities of the Basque University System on this procedure.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/institutional-docentia/>

AUDIT. The EHEA framework and the changes made in the Spanish legislation to adapt to it require universities to guarantee that their teaching-learning activities allow students to acquire the objectives associated with each study programme, while, at the same time, seeking to enhance them. Therefore, universities should apply a formally established and publicly available system for Internal Quality Assurance (IQAS – SIGC in Spanish).

The purpose of AUDIT is to favour and strengthen the development and implementation of IQAS at universities. It aims mainly at guiding university faculties in designing their own IQAS.

Since 2007 Unibasq offers the AUDIT programme and uses for this the procedures that were initially developed by ANECA in collaboration with AQU Catalunya and ACSUG. Subsequently, Unibasq developed a procedure for the delivery of “certificates” attesting different stages of achievement of IQAS (design and implementation). The review of the design is a desk-based review done by the AUDIT Committee. For the certification of the implementation a panel

makes a visit to institution and checks the efficiency of the IQAS. These reviews are done taking into account the following guidelines:

- 1.0. Quality policy and objectives
- 1.1. Quality of the programmes
- 1.2. Student orientated programmes
- 1.3. Quality of the teaching staff
- 1.4. Quality of the resources
- 1.5. Analysis of the results
- 1.6. Publication of the information

A great satisfaction of Unibasq is that the faculties and schools of the three universities of the Basque University System have participated very actively in this programme. Currently, all the centres of Deusto and Mondragon Universities have certified their IQAS. Regarding UPV/EHU, as a result of the internal reorganization of its centres which meant some fusions, it will take a little bit longer. Although in this moment 48.5% of the faculties and schools of the Basque University System have their IQAS certified and 8 more faculties are going to be reviewed by the end of 2018 (which would mean 73% of IQAS certified). This means that the Basque University System is one of the systems in Spain with the highest rate of IQAS certified.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/institutional-audit/>

Institutional accreditation.

Currently the first stage of the institutional accreditation procedure is about to start in Spain. Royal Decree 420/2015 of May 29th, about creation, recognition, authorisation and verification of universities and university centres established that the university faculties or schools which have their IQAS implementation certified and with at least 50% of their Bachelor and 50% of their Master study programmes accredited can ask for institutional accreditation. The procedure to be followed is described in a Resolution of 7th of March of 2018 of the Universities General Secretariat of Spain. This first stage is practically automatic if the two conditions mentioned above are met. Once the institutional accreditation is awarded, all study programmes under the control of the institution (or faculty or school) are deemed to be accredited from the same date with a validity of five years. Taking into account the AUDIT procedure outcomes, the Basque University System is ready to face this new challenge.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/institutional-institutional-accreditation/>

The second stage of this procedure, the reaccreditation procedure, which is still to be designed, will be agreed and developed among the Spanish agencies within the REACU network and will be approved by the University Policy General Conference. Due to the advanced situation of the Basque University System (as commented before by 2019 around 73% of the faculties and schools of the Basque University System will have their IQAS certified), Unibasq is already reflecting on this topic and has already arranged a working group

to work on the development of this new procedure and will lead the corresponding working group in REACU.

The **international activities** engaged in by the Agency are shown in point 8. International activities engaged in by the Agency. The procedure is very similar to the one used in the ex-post accreditation of Basque study programmes, including a site visit and with the same criteria, although the specific requirements of Basque and Spanish regulations are not taken into account.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/international-international-evaluations/>

OTHER EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

External evaluation of other study programmes

As mentioned before, apart from the official study programmes that need to undergo a compulsory external evaluation, there are some other study programmes that lead to diplomas or qualifications issued by the university itself, and are therefore called “títulos propios” in Spanish (awarded by the HEI itself, not the State). They exist mainly at postgraduate level. Since 2006 Unibasq evaluates all new study programmes of this type of the UPV/EHU on the basis of an agreement signed with the university. In this case, the evaluation consists of a report based on the university’s internally defined evaluation criteria. It is a desk-based review that looks into four dimensions: training programme (academic planning, if applicable, internships and review systems); academic staff (adequacy of the academic commission and the teaching staff); students (access requirements, support systems and their participation in the improvement of the programme); and management (funding, administration staff and infrastructures and resources).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-certificates-and-diplomas-titulos-proprios/>

Artistic study programmes.

The aim of this evaluation procedure is the evaluation of Higher Education Artistic Study programmes in the Basque Country. In this case, Unibasq’s evaluation report is submitted to the Spanish Ministry in charge of higher education for the official approval of the programme. It is a desk-based review very similar to the ex-ante accreditation procedure for official study programmes and the following dimensions are reviewed: description, justification, skills, students’ access and admission, study plan, academic staff, resources and services, expected outcomes and schedule.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-artistic-study-programmes/>

In addition, Unibasq performs some other assessment activities at institutional level.

- **Review of institutional agreements.** The aim of this activity is to report annually on the fulfilment of the institutional agreements signed between the Basque Government and each of the universities in the Basque University System. The main purpose of these agreements is to mobilise universities for the achievement of the specific objectives established in the regional [University Plan](#). Unibasq has reviewed the indicators and the activities done and made a report for the Basque Government since 2008.
- **Recognition of new universities.** Royal Decree 420/2015 of 29 May 2015, about the creation, recognition, authorisation and verification of universities and university centres, and regional Law 3/2004 on the Basque University System, require that new Universities that plan to operate in the Basque Country require a positive ex-ante report from Unibasq for their creation and recognition, this is also a desk-based review.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/institucional-recognition-of-universities/>

Evaluation of academic staff:

Even if this kind of evaluation procedures, the evaluation of individual academics, is not common in Europe, Unibasq makes a great effort to perform these evaluation activities as they represent a big part of the agency activity as can be seen in table 5 and Section 8.5.

- Individual **accreditation of teaching and research personnel** to allow them to become eligible for positions at public universities and at private universities of the Basque University System (staff “Accreditation” since 2008).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/teaching-staff-accreditation-of-teaching-staff/>

- **Evaluation of the individual performance of teaching and research personnel** of the public University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) in order to determine who should get a share of the budget for extra compensation (“bonus”) earmarked by the Government of the Basque Country for high-performance academic staff (since 2007).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/teaching-staff-complementary-payments/>

- **Research:**
 - Evaluation of the permanently contracted teaching and research personnel of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) for the validation of six-year periods of research activity that serves nation-wide as a basis for the promotion of academic staff (since 2010).

- Ikertramos. Evaluation of the research activity of universities' teaching and research personnel with no permanent contract. This new evaluation procedure will be regulated by an agreement between Unibasq and each university (since 2017).
- Iker22. Research activity assessment for the teaching and research personnel of the universities which are contracted according to the Article 22 of the Law 14/2011 about Science, Technology and Innovation. The evaluation procedure will be regulated by an agreement between Unibasq and the university. The aim of this review procedure is to see the evolution of the research activity and performance of the researchers contracted as stated in the abovementioned article (since 2018).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/teaching-staff-research/>

Unibasq is developing several new activities that will cause a great impact in the Basque University System, emphasising in improvement – not just in the evaluation – of the quality. Expansion of activities is possible thanks to the acquired experience by the Agency and its staff, as a result of the stability provided by the contract-programme signed with the Basque Government and the satisfactory cooperation with the universities in the Basque University System, who find external support in Unibasq and not an overseeing Agency. In addition, there are specific consultancy tasks or reports required by the Basque Government, as questions regarding the equivalence of study programmes previous to the ones adapted to the EHEA for public administration positions.

6 Agency's internal quality assurance

Quality is the key focus on which Unibasq's activity is developed. Since it first commenced its activities, Unibasq has based its assessment processes on their continuous improvement and on internationally-recognised and standardised quality-based principles, such as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Unibasq's commitment to quality can be seen in particular in its own [internal quality policy](#) and in its Quality Handbook (see Annexes 4 and 5). The quality policy establishes that Unibasq will maintain a quality management system which includes all key processes of the agency. This quality management system pursues a process-based approach. The processes involved are shown on the map of processes, together with the sequence and interaction between them. All information regarding Unibasq's IQAS is gathered in its Quality Handbook, including the indicators for the monitoring of the agency's activities and its compliance with its strategic plan.

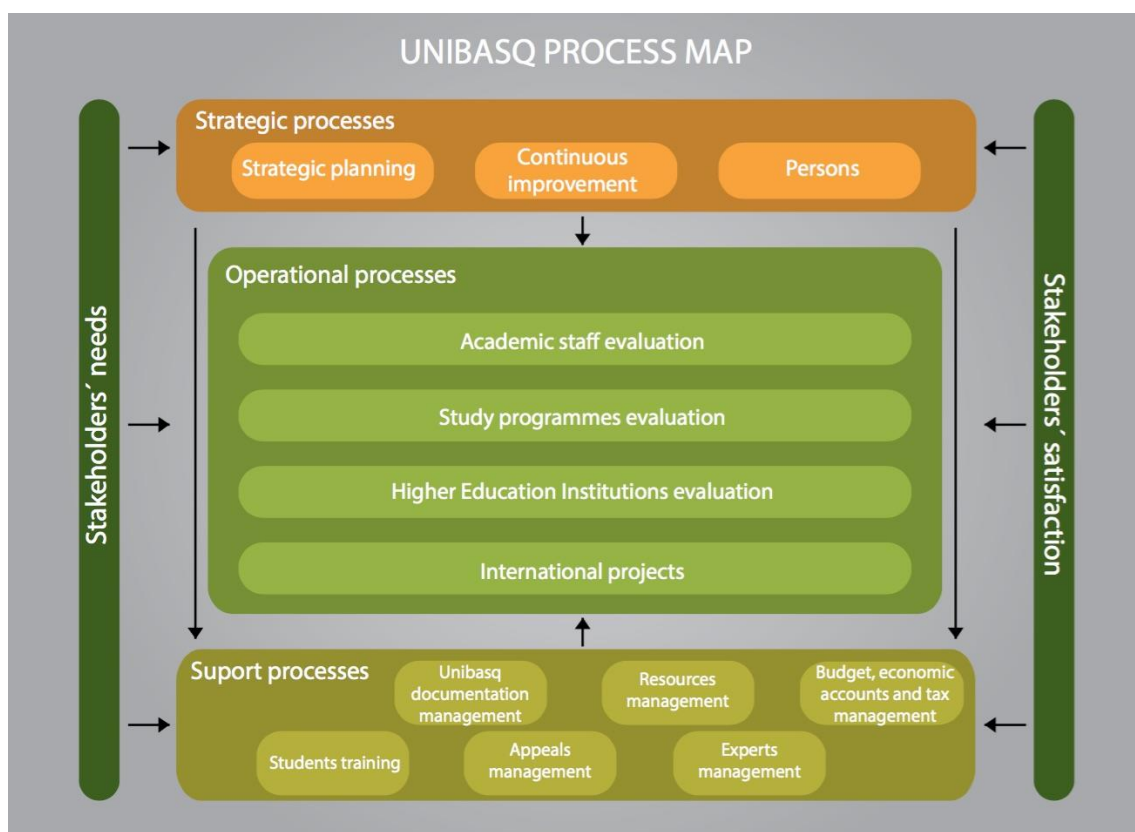


Figure 3. Unibasq Process map.

In order to further improve its organizational performance, Unibasq arranges external reviews of its management system, in particular through its cooperation agreement with EUSKALIT-Advanced Management, a private, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote the

use of advanced management tools throughout the Basque country, with the ultimate goal of contributing to its competitiveness and sustainable development. Unibasq shares the view that the hallmark of truly excellent organizations is their ability to obtain and maintain outstanding results in all their management areas. Whilst achieving these results is, in itself, a difficult task, maintaining them in a world of increasing global competition, technological innovation, continuous change in production processes, economic and social instability and ever-changing customer demands represents an even greater challenge. EUSKALIT offers Basque organizations its help and support in improving their management up to the highest standards of excellence which has fostered the spreading of quality culture throughout the region. Unibasq has already passed two external reviews (Diploma awarded in 2017) and is preparing itself for a complete external review by EUSKALIT in 2019. In addition, as stated before, Unibasq was awarded the Bikain certificate regarding the quality of the use of the Basque language at the end of 2017 (see Section 4.3 regarding the composition of Evaluation Committees).

7 Agency's international activities

One of the recommendations of the previous review was that “Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.” This recommendation has been seen as an opportunity to improve Unibasq’s international projection and has been included in the reflection process that led to the new strategic plan. The [Strategic Plan 2016-2019](#) establishes “Internationalisation supporting the Basque University System” as a strategic priority for Unibasq and highlight in particular: taking part in international networks and in the development of international projects; promoting international consultancy and assessment activities; and facilitating the relations among Basque and some other universities.

In order to achieve this, Unibasq has raised its international profile and its recognition at European level through:

Memberships

- It has been included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since November 2014;
- It has been a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since September 2014 and in October 2016 Unibasq’s Director became a member of ENQA’s Board;
- The agency has been a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) since December 2015 and in June 2018 Unibasq’s Internationalisation and Projects Manager became a member of ECA’s Board;
- It has also been a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) since 2013.

Projects

Currently, Unibasq is a partner in the following European projects:

- [Database of External Quality Assurance Results \(DEQAR\)](#). This project – led by EQAR - was selected for EU co-funding under Erasmus+ Key Action 3 - European Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects. The main aim of the DEQAR project is the development of a database that will enhance access to QA reports and decisions on higher education institutions/programmes externally reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency. The database is expected to interest a broad range of users, including but not limited to:
 - Recognition information centres (ENIC-NARICs)
 - Recognition officers in higher education institutions
 - Students
 - Quality assurance agencies
 - Ministry representatives and other national authoritiesto satisfy their information needs and support different types of decisions.

- [Facilitating implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes \(ImpEA\)](#). The main aim of this project – led by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) - is to support the efficient implementation of the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#). This aim will be achieved by successfully completing of the following tasks:
 - Identifying key obstacles in implementation of the European Approach in the European Higher Education Area in general, and specifically in project partner countries;
 - Supporting partner QA agencies in running EA-based programme accreditation procedures (ex-ante and ex post);
 - Supporting partner HEI in pursuing the external accreditation based on the European Approach;
 - Developing an EA implementation toolkit (set of recommendations and proposed solutions for the policy makers and QA agencies).

In addition, in 2018 Unibasq is part of two new project proposals: a project proposal called “Quality assurance enhancing confidence in work-based learning” led by Unibasq was presented at the KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, KA203 - Strategic Partnerships for higher education 2018 Erasmus+ call and it is a partner of the “Equity and Social Responsibility in higher education through quality assurance” project proposal led by the ECA presented at the Erasmus+ EACEA-10-2018 call. More information regarding if both projects are accepted will be available after the summer.

Working groups

As member of ECA, Unibasq currently participates in the following working groups:

- [Working Group on Mutual recognition and joint programmes](#) (currently chaired by Unibasq). Mutual recognition was the starting point of ECA in 2003 and reaching the first mutual recognition agreements in 2007 was a milestone of the ECA project. The working group continued to focus on mutual recognition of the accreditation of joint programmes. Evaluating the implementation of these agreements, further developing of the mutual recognition methodology and identifying the most useful areas of application in co-operation with stakeholders such as ENIC-NARICs and joint programmes are central features of the current work of WG 1. Since June 2017 Unibasq chairs this working group.
- [Working Group on Innovation in QA and Accreditation](#). The main theme of Working Group 2 is the Innovation in QA and Accreditation. This working group focuses on the following innovative topics:
 - Employability & Transversal skills
 - Cross-border higher education/Internationalisation activities
 - Risk-based approaches / Risk analysis
 - Regional thematic seminars
- [Certification Group](#). This is a standing committee focusing on the [methodology of ECA’s Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation \(CeQuint\)](#). Unibasq is part of this working group with a specific interest in developing methodologies to review the

quality of internationalisation of its institutions and help them enhancing it as part of the objectives set in its Strategic plan.

At the end of 2016, Unibasq joined [ENQA's Working group on Quality Assurance and Recognition](#), which is currently finished and has its continuation in the [Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance – LIREQA project](#) where Unibasq collaborates. LIREQA aims at contributing to fair recognition of qualifications by developing recommendations to relate academic recognition to both internal and external quality assurance.

International evaluations

As part of the commitments taken in its strategic plan regarding internationalisation, Unibasq has taken up a contact with some universities in Latin-America that have signed agreements with a university in the Basque Country. Due to previous visits/meeting and contacts of Unibasq's Director with representatives of Latin-American universities (Chile, Guatemala, Dominican republic...), an agreement, that will lead to the pilot external review of the Law programme of the University of Aconcagua (Chile) by the end of 2018, was signed. The procedure is very similar to the one used by Unibasq for regular ex-post accreditation and the evaluation criteria are an adaptation of the usual ones: they are in line with the ESGs, but do not include some specific requirements of the Spanish and Basque regulations.

Cooperation with other agencies

In order to further enhance its international activities Unibasq has also signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with a number of agencies in other European countries (AQAS, HCERES, CTI and FIBAA) with the main objective of sharing experience and good practices in the field of quality assessment and accreditation, including the sharing of skilled experts and collaboration in the field of experts and staff training. This has already led to two pilot training sessions with AQAS: one for the training of German-speaking experts from Spanish and Basque universities and one for the training of Spanish-speaking experts from German universities, some of them already working with both agencies. This initiative was presented at the [INQAAHE conference](#) in Bahrain in 2017. It has already had an important impact on the participation of international experts in the external quality assurance procedures, both at Unibasq and AQAS.

All these activities have promoted improvements and new developments of evaluation procedures, as dual degrees on working environment, as well as an increase of international experts in the Evaluation committees.

8 Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

8.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Unibasq activities are established in the LOMLOU (article 31) and in the regulation developing this law, as well in Act 13/2012 (Annex 2) and in Unibasq's statutes which state that the Agency will perform the activities of evaluation, certification and accreditation of study programmes, institutions and teaching staff.

Mission: To help improve the Basque university system by promoting its quality and taking into account the interest groups involved in higher education.

Vision: Unibasq carries out its activities independently, transparently, objectively, effectively and competently, basing itself on international standards that guarantee quality in higher education.

Values: The agency's values are described in detail in its Code of Ethics and Guarantees, and may be summarised as follows:

- Independence and autonomy, in fulfilling its obligations.
- Transparency, in terms of communicating its processes, criteria and forms.
- User-oriented, by attending to the needs of interest groups.
- Respect for the autonomy and diversity of universities.
- Social responsibility, in performing the tasks entrusted to it, via efficient use of the resources it has been assigned and accountability via the publication of an annual report.
- Collaboration with the agents involved in higher education in order to achieve common goals.
- Cooperation with other agencies and national and international networks in order to develop functions and processes.
- Involvement in continuous improvement and innovation in order to develop all processes.

After the previous review and taking into account all the recommendations made, at the end of 2015, the Governing Council approved the [Strategic Plan of Unibasq \(2016-2019\)](#) (Annex 1), which includes 4 strategic lines:

- 1. Services: Consultancy and Assessment.
- 2. Social Influence: Communication, Collaboration with Institutions, Quality Agencies and Social Agents.

- 3. Agency's Internationalisation Backing the Basque University System.
- 4. Internal Organization, Management, Planning and Human Resources.

These strategic objectives are further developed into specific activities in the Unibasq's sequence of annual management plans, which are publicly available too. There is a high fulfilment of the objectives set in these plans in the last years.

Stakeholders are involved in the different bodies of the Agency (Governing Board, Advisory Board, Evaluation Committees, and Students' Consultative Committee). According to the law (Unibasq Act) the participation of students is guaranteed in institutional and programme evaluation committees, but they are not allowed to take part in the evaluation and accreditation of individual teachers/researchers or administrative/service staff. Professionals with a proven track record in the knowledge area to be evaluated are involved as participants in the Committees for the evaluation of study programmes, and Quality Assurance experts are part of the AUDIT Committee. Unibasq has undertaken a special effort in order to involve more international persons: in addition to their participation in the Governing Council (1 member) and Advisory Board (4 members), the number of international experts is increasing in the Evaluation Committees for AUDIT, DOCENTIA and some of the study programmes committees (see Table 8 in Section 4.3). As stated before, it is important to bear in mind that Unibasq faces as well an important challenge to find Basque speaking experts who are not part of the Basque University System, as most of our experts must be from outside our system.

8.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

The agency was first created (Section 79 of Act 3/2004 governing the Basque University System) as Uniquial - the Quality Evaluation and Accreditation Agency for the Basque University System), which started its activities on 4 April 2005 when its Board of Directors was first established.

Afterwards, in order to bring the Quality Evaluation and Accreditation Agency for the Basque University System in line with the ESG, it was necessary to modify the way in which it was legally regulated and to pass a specific law regarding the agency.

Therefore, the Basque Parliament approved Act 13/2012, of 28 June 2012, governing Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System. In compliance with the new Law, Decree 204/2013 was adopted on 16 April 2013 to approve the new Statutes of Unibasq.

Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System performs its functions within the legal form of a public entity linked to the Basque Government's department responsible for universities, but its activities are submitted to private law. Hence, Unibasq is a legal entity in its own right, with full capacity to act and with complete control over its own resources for the purpose of performing its functions.

According to Article 2 of Act 13/2012, the Agency's aims are "the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System, taking into consideration its Spanish, European and international dimensions".

The purposes of the Agency are:

- To promote and ensure quality throughout the Basque University System, taking into consideration the Spanish, European and international contexts.
- To help improve the quality of the Basque University System.
- To provide society with information about the results of the Agency's activities.
- To provide public administrations, universities and other educational or scientific-technological stakeholders with information and guidelines for their decision-making processes in the functional areas of the Agency.

8.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

Act 13/2012 regulating the existence and operation of Unibasq, together with its Statutes; ensure the independence of the Agency, as can be seen in several selected paragraphs from the Act:

In the introduction: *"(...) the agency must have official status, carry out institutional evaluation activities, be accountable for its work both to the Basque Government and society; it must also clearly and independently define its mission and have sufficient human and physical resources to fulfil it. It must work independently from governmental and university authorities and in accordance with objective, public and internationally comparable procedures and standards"*.

In article 1: *"...it is a legal person of its own, with full capacity to act and full control over its own capital resources for the purpose of performing its functions in accordance with this Act."*

In article 4.2: *"The Agency must act fully independently and objectively in the performance of its evaluation accreditation and certification activities."*

In article 4.4: *"The evaluation committees must act fully independently and the result of their assessments cannot be changed by any other body of the Agency."*

In article 6.6: *"Members of the Agency's bodies act in their own name in full independence of judgement, and not as representatives of any constituency to which they may belong."*

Besides, it must be taken into account that Unibasq is a public entity governed by private law (which gives it more administrative and financial autonomy) and that it has a programme-contract that is a very effective tool guaranteeing Unibasq's management autonomy.

Organisational independence

As stated in Unibasq Act 13/2012, *“The separation between the functions of governance and evaluation is meant to fulfil the principle of independence of the agency in its evaluation activities. Hence, the Governing Board, which includes representatives from universities and the Basque Government, is responsible for the strategic governance of the agency and for setting its objectives, while the Advisory Committee is responsible for planning and organising the evaluation activities and implementing the strategic decisions”*.

Operational independence

Operational independence is a core dimension. It can be seen in the Agency’s capacity to develop its own evaluation, accreditation and certification processes and procedures, including the selection of experts. It is also a core point in the Agency’s Statutes, which refers to its independence as a fundamental value. Operational independence is also emphasised in Article 10 of Unibasq’s Code of Ethics and Guarantees.

The independence of Unibasq’s operations is mainly based upon the operational independence of its Technical Bodies (the Advisory Board and the Evaluation Committees) whose members must be mainly from outside the Basque University System (See Section 4.3). The definition of procedures and methods for the evaluation procedures, and the appointment of external experts is the responsibility of the Director, upon the recommendation of the Advisory Board. Being a member of the scientific-technical bodies of the agency is incompatible with the holding of a single-person managerial position at any institution that may be potentially evaluated. The outcome of each individual evaluation is the responsibility of the Evaluation Committee, which doesn’t contain staff of the agency or members of the Governing or Advisory Boards. The role of Unibasq staff is just as methodological advisors. This separation of responsibilities ensures the independence of decision-making concerning evaluation, accreditation and certification. The selection of experts and evaluation committees is conducted in every case according to public requirements and clear criteria set out in Unibasq’s Statutes, strictly following the procedure for the selection of Unibasq experts adopted by the Agency and published on its website. The Advisory Board is in charge of the evaluation of adequate candidates for each evaluation committee. Once the selection is made, the Advisory Board proposes the list of candidates to the Director for the corresponding appointment. Every expert has to sign his/her acceptance of the code of ethics and a declaration of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interests.

Independence in the respect of formal outcomes

In all evaluation procedures the decision of the Evaluation Committee is binding, and it is transmitted to the Agency’s Director for communication. In article 4.4 of Unibasq Law it is established that *“The evaluation committees must act fully independently and the result of their assessments cannot be changed by any other body of the Agency.”* This has a direct impact in the way appeals can be dealt with, as there cannot be an appeals body with reassessment rights.

8.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

Article 3 of Act 13/2012 governing the Agency specifically says that Unibasq should provide society with information about the result of its activities and should provide public administrations, universities and other educational or scientific-technological agents with information and guidelines for their decision-making processes in the functional areas of the agency. In addition, the previous review flagged this issue and it even established that resources should be granted for this activity.

In this regard, Unibasq regularly produces a series of different documents that are all published on the Agency's website, so that all stakeholders involved can have access at any time to the relevant information:

Annual reports

- Unibasq releases an [annual report on its activities](#).
- Since 2008, it publishes annually, and in collaboration with ANECA and the other Spanish quality assurance agencies, [a joint report on the status of external quality assessment of Spanish universities](#). This report presents the main outcomes of the activities of the higher education quality assurance agencies, both with respect to the evaluation of study programmes and institutions and of teaching and research staff.
- There is a [meta-evaluation](#) of each type of evaluation procedure used at Unibasq: such reports may be annual or periodic with a view to assessing the impact and possible need for improvement of the procedures. The reflection is focused on the universities' results, in order to identify good practices and areas which need further improvement to achieve the aims of each institution. It helps also improving the review procedures and finding synergies among our review procedures so HEIs are not so overloaded. An example can be found in our ex-post accreditation procedure where the outcomes of AUDIT and DOCENTIA procedures are taken into account and some items are not reviewed twice.

Specific reports

- [Monographic reports](#) are specifically written on topics of interest, for example, on employability (in collaboration with the Novia Salcedo Foundation) or on rankings after some reflection on specific topics.
- In addition, Unibasq has started publishing a [small review summary](#) – with the reflections made and the conclusions reached - about the summer courses or workshops run by the Agency (since 2016), in the expectation that the information provided in those events will become easily accessible. The topics chosen for these events are of interest for the agency, universities and society in general (like employability), as can be seen in the following paragraphs.

As stated before, since 2012 Unibasq organises different symposia, workshops, summer courses for universities and stakeholders; they deal with “hot” topics and provide relevant

information that can help Basque Universities in improving their quality and their quality enhancement instruments. The following list provides examples of such events.

- **2012**
 - I. Unibasq symposium **“The quality of the Basque Country university system: a commitment by all”**. The symposium was intended as a meeting point of the different stakeholders contributing to higher education quality in the Basque University System.
 - In 2012 Unibasq organised the annual national public event for the **presentation of certificates granted to Spanish higher education entities with a positive evaluation in the AUDIT procedure**. In this setting, the experiences of some universities and of the agencies participating in the scheme were exchanged, showing the positive impact of the AUDIT procedure on the development of the universities’ Internal Quality Assurance Systems over the last few years.
- **2013**
 - II. Unibasq symposium **“The quality of the Basque Country university system: the users' view point”**.
 - Together with other Spanish quality assurance agencies participating in the scheme, in 2013 Unibasq organised **“The First Conference on Best Practices in the DOCENTIA procedure”**. The event intended to highlight the good practices performed by universities on the basis of their involvement in the DOCENTIA scheme. The objective of the conference was to support the dissemination and encourage further improvement of the evaluation scheme.
- **2014**
 - Workshop on the **Internationalisation of the Basque University System**.
 - III. Unibasq symposium **“The quality of the Basque Country university system: internationalisation opportunities”**.
- **2015** – I. international workshop in Canfranc in collaboration with ACPUA – **“After the ministerial meeting in Armenia: the new ESG – Challenges for QAAs and HEIs”**.
- **2016**
 - Summer Course 2016 (Teaching quality) **[“Evaluación docente: asignatura pendiente”](#)**
 - Workshop on governance **“The public research centres in the governance of the I+D+I system in Catalonia and the Basque Country”**.
- **2017**
 - Workshop about the **certification of universities’ IQAS**
 - Transference Workshop **[Social Impact of the Research Activity: Let’s Take Some Steps](#)**
 - Summer Course 2017 on graduates employability **[¿Qué hace una universitaria como tú en un trabajo como éste?](#)**
- **2018**
 - Summer course 2018 dealing with the evaluation of the social impact of universities (**“Social Impact of universities. Institutional and Individual Approach”**)

All these events help stakeholders' engagement and involvement without losing independence since a direct contact is granted to know their needs and topics of interest.

Since 2016, as part of its vision in society, the agency endeavours to be recognised by higher education institutions, the university community and society at large as an agent that improves the quality of the Basque University System, as well as its internationalisation and social projection.

For this, one of the strategic areas of the new strategic plan 2016-2019 is focused on communication, collaboration with institutions, quality agencies and social agents. This has become one of the main objectives of the agency, including several specific aspects related with the social diffusion of the agency activities and the increase of collaboration with stakeholders, specially students and employers.

Since 2016, apart from the annual reports, we annually organize a summer course specifically dedicated to an interesting topic, selected after consulting with stakeholders, Governing and Advisory boards, and the Students' consultative committee.

Therefore, the topics for the three summer courses have been related with "how to assess good teaching methodologies"; "ways to improve employability" and "the social impact of universities". In fact, these are topics in which Unibasq is also involved through some European working groups in ECA and ENQA.

Moreover, in order to promote the use and dissemination of the results of the academic activity of the Basque universities. As a key instrument for this purpose, Unibasq set up at the end of 2017 an [Observatory of the Activity of the Basque University System \(Unibasq Behatokia\)](#), a new digital tool that grants access to the general public with one click to general and detailed data of all Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctorate Programmes offered at public and private institutions in the Basque Country.

Unibasq Behatokia has also links to different [international rankings of reference](#) for universities. In order to help understand the information provided, a report has been done to read all data, and contextualise the information internationally.

Unibasq Behatokia makes available to Basque society a global vision of university activity in the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country. Information referring to each university (Universidad del Pais Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, University of Deusto and Mondragon Unibertsitatea) and to the Basque University System, as a whole, can be found.

In a much more detailed manner, stakeholders can find important documentation (memos, monitoring reports, renewal reports, etc.) about each one of the qualifications (Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctorates) taught in the Basque University System, as well as quantitative indicators referring to supply and demand of places, human resources, learning outcomes, and employment rates.

Unibasq will continue its efforts to improve and adapt Unibasq Behatokia to social demand, thanks in particular to the collection of suggestions from the different stakeholders. In October 2018 several meetings are planned with the heads of Basque Secondary Schools in order to

present them the observatory and show how it can be used to help students in their choice for a university degree.

Finally, Unibasq is part of one of REACU working groups which deals with thematic analysis. This working group defined the common data that could be gathered in all Spanish agencies in order to make a system wide analysis of the ex-post accreditation results.

8.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

Unibasq is a public legal entity. Before 2016, the financial resources were approved annually within the Basque budget. In order to improve independence and to gain stability, we have now a Programme-Contract covering a period of four years, which enables to us fulfil the objectives set in the Strategic plan. One specific objective is the improvement of the organization's structure and operations, to increase the staff motivation, the ethic compromise and internal communication, in order to face the new challenges of the agency since its entrance in ENQA and EQAR.

For the current period, Unibasq has adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out its work. In the following lines evidence that Unibasq has sufficient resources to carry out at the agreed level of quality all the various activities set out in the Programme-Contract and the Annual Management Plans is given. Naturally, one challenge for the next period 2020-2024 will be to stabilize the three new members of the staff and to increase financial resources proportionally to the international activity.

In the following lines, we detail the situation for the period 2016-19.

Financial resources

[2016-2019 Programme-Contract between the General Administration of the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country and Unibasq](#)

Unibasq's budget is included in the budget of the Basque Autonomous Region, annually approved by the Basque Parliament, but it is not mixed-up with other budgets and thus keeps its separate entity since Unibasq signed in 2016 a programme-contract with the Department of Education of the Basque Government for the period 2016-2019.

The programme-contract includes a funding formula linked to the achievement of the agreed objectives and includes the economic and financial forecasting for the whole extent of the four-year period. Both Law 13/2012 (that created Unibasq, the Agency for Quality of the Basque University System) and Decree 204/2013 (that approved the statutes of the agency)

provide that the resources required by the agency for the performance of its functions and coming from the General Budget of the Autonomous Region of the Basque Country, will be agreed upon within the framework of a pluri-annual programme-contract.

The programme-contract defines the Agency's objectives for the 2016-2019 period, as well as the activities and initiatives to be performed in order to fulfil the aforementioned objectives, all in line with the strategies set in the Strategic Plan.

The programme-contract should be understood mainly as a quality enhancement tool encompassing all activity areas of the Agency. It is also meant to provide a stable framework ensuring the continuity of the activities aimed at achieving the objectives set in the Strategic plan. Finally, it is a very effective tool guaranteeing Unibasq's management autonomy.

On 18th December 2015, Unibasq's Governing Board approved the 2016-2019 Strategic plan along 4 main strategic lines: Consultancy and evaluation, social influence, internationalisation and internal organization. Unibasq has planned for this period to increase the consultancy and collaboration tasks with the Basque socio-economic environment, to simplify and consolidate the evaluation activities, to improve its social dissemination and to support the internationalisation of the Basque University System.

Unibasq pays careful attention to carrying out all its activities in line with the strategic priorities and the enhancement objectives laid down in the Strategic Plan. Likewise, the programme-contract structure makes it possible to link each activity with the priority objectives it serves in the Strategic plan and with the relevant follow-up indicators used for the purpose of performance-based funding.

With respect to the different types of budgetary resources, the programme-contract provides for the funding of Unibasq in 3 lines. The first one is called "Basic funding" and includes the Agency's staff structure and the overhead costs, i.e. the Agency's current basis expenses.

The second one is "Regular activities funding" and includes all those budget lines allocated to the fulfilment to the functions and activities that are entrusted to Unibasq by Law.

Finally, the third one is "Performance-based funding" and corresponds to the activity Unibasq plans to do in order to improve and increase its consultancy and evaluation activities, as well as to enhance the quality and the international perspective of the Basque University System.

Altogether, the financial resources allocated to the Agency for the financial years 2016-2019 are 5.131.411 Euros, distributed as follows between the three types of funding over the four financial years:

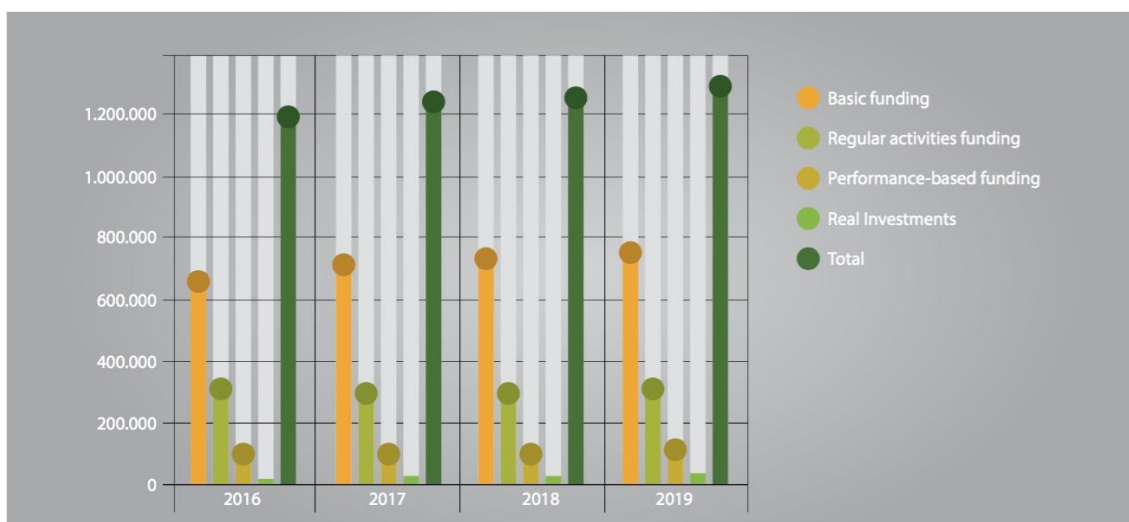


Figure 4. Distribution of finances according to the programme contract 2016-2019.

In addition to these public resources provided from the budget of the Basque Country, Unibasq plans to generate self-financing as shown in the next table:

Table 9. Distribution self-financing according to the programme contract 2016-2019.

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Self-financing | 202.739 €* | 35.857 € | 50.482 € | 65.713 € | 354.791 € |

*Higher amount expected due to the fees for the external evaluation of the individual performance of teaching and research personnel of the public University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

The follow-up and control of the achievement of the objectives and commitments set in the programme-contract will be under the control of the Follow-up Commission created for this purpose. It meets once a year and the minutes of this meeting provide an opinion and evidence about the extent of achievement of the agreed targets. Until now, these minutes demonstrate that Unibasq was fully compliant with its objectives and meta-indicators for the years 2016 and 2017.

The following table shows the real evolution of income over recent years (BAR stands for Basque Autonomous Region).

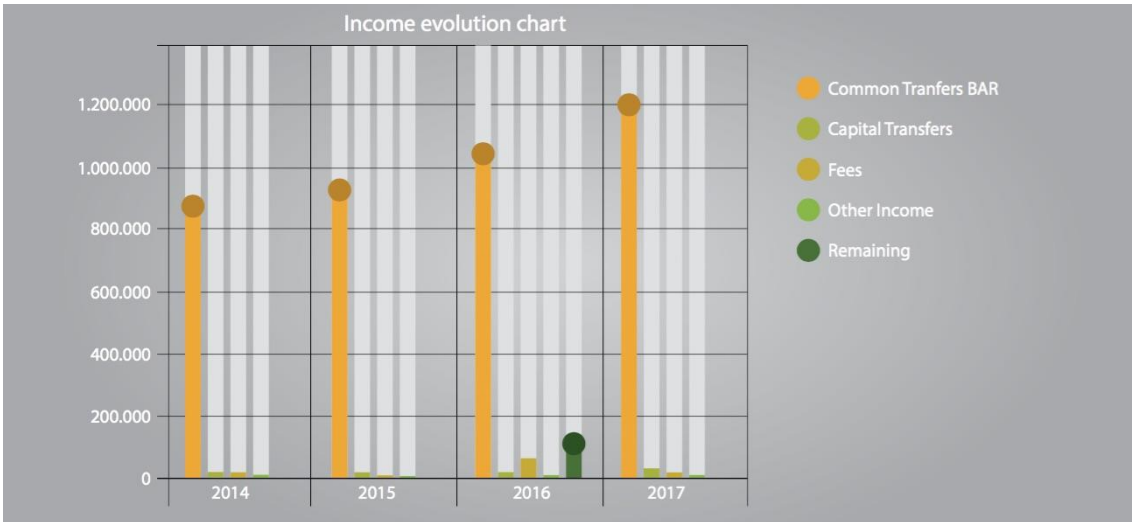


Figure 5. Income evolution chart 2014-2017.

Unibasq is fully independent to allocate the budget between the different areas and activities. Each year, the Governing Board of the Agency approves the Annual Management Plan (AMP), which is subsequently monitored in the annual budget implementation report.

The commitment by the agency to achieving the most efficient management of its resources has led to the development of an effective cost accounting system, which enables management to know and control the costs of each project or activity and thus supports its decision-making process.

The following chart shows the distribution of expenses by activity.

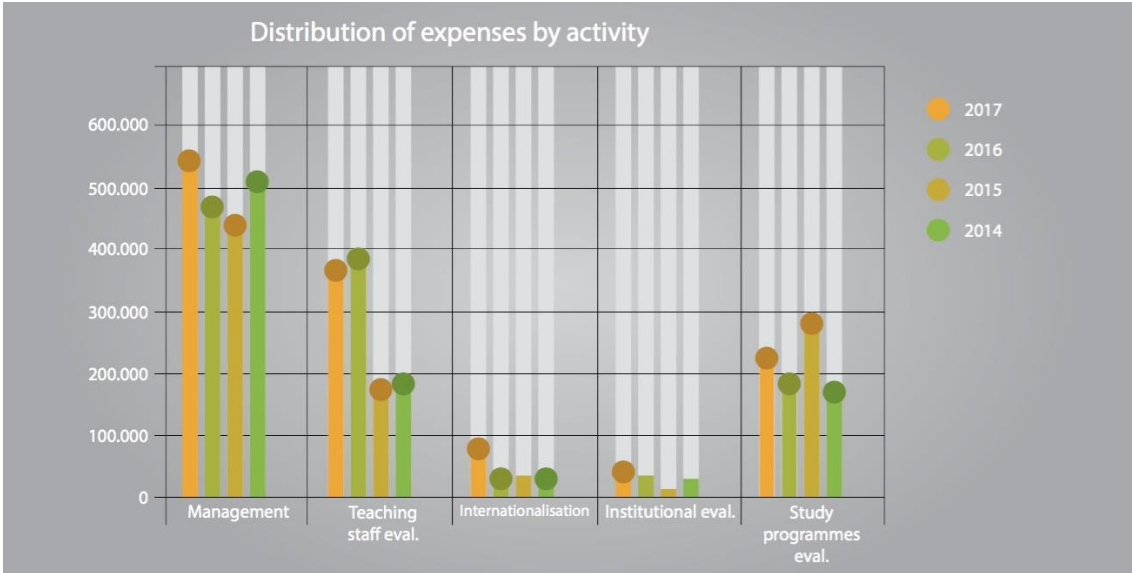


Figure 6. Distribution of expenses by activity 2014-2017.

As a public legal entity, Unibasq is required by Basque Law to submit itself to a formal annual economic and financial audit. These audits have always been fully favourable. This provides

evidence that Unibasq has sufficient resources to carry out at the agreed level of quality all the various activities set out in the Programme-Contract and the Annual Management Plan.

The Agency has its own [Transparency Portal](#) where it displays, among other information, data relating to its budgets, audited accounts and contracts.

Human resources

Own Staff

In its 2014 review of Unibasq, ENQA recommended that the Agency “should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA”. In response to this recommendation, one of the main priorities in Unibasq’s Strategic Plan 2016-2019 is specifically “to improve the organization structure and operations and to increase staff’s motivation, ethic commitment and internal communication, in order to meet the new challenges of the agency since its entrance in ENQA and EQAR”. This is also picked up in Unibasq’s programme-contract for the years 2016-2019, which allocates “Basic funding” in order to allow the Agency “to make an assessment of all job positions and approve a staff reference structure”, together with the option of hiring three additional staff members (two full-time and one part-time).

This allowed Unibasq to start by the end of 2015 a study with the aim of preparing its staff to the new responsibilities and challenges in the Agency. As a result, the organization chart was changed, redistributing the functions and appointing Evaluation Processes Managers and Coordinators. (See figure 7). A great effort has been made in order to stabilize and consolidate the staff. The current number of staff at Unibasq is as follows:

Table 10. Unibasq own staff composition.

| | |
|--|----|
| Director | 1 |
| Deputy Director | 1 |
| Evaluation Processes Manager and Coordinator | 3 |
| Internationalisation and Projects Manager | 1 |
| Economy and Finance Manager | 1 |
| Evaluation Technical Staff | 3 |
| Evaluation Assistant Staff | 2 |
| Executive Secretary | 1 |
| TOTAL | 13 |

These figures reflect the complete reorganisation of staff that could be made at Unibasq, taking advantage of the opportunity to hire 3 new persons and considering the Agency’s new functions and responsibilities. In this way, new procedures and activities could start and the participation in the activities of ENQA and some other international networks could be boosted. The former Evaluation Manager became the new Internationalisation and Projects Manager, which made it easier to focus efforts in this direction: Unibasq is currently part of several international working groups and takes part in two European projects, and its Director was elected as ENQA Board member in October 2016 and its Internationalisation and Projects Manager became ECA Board member in June 2018.

In order to complement this information, the following graph shows the evolution of Unibasq’s staff since 2014.

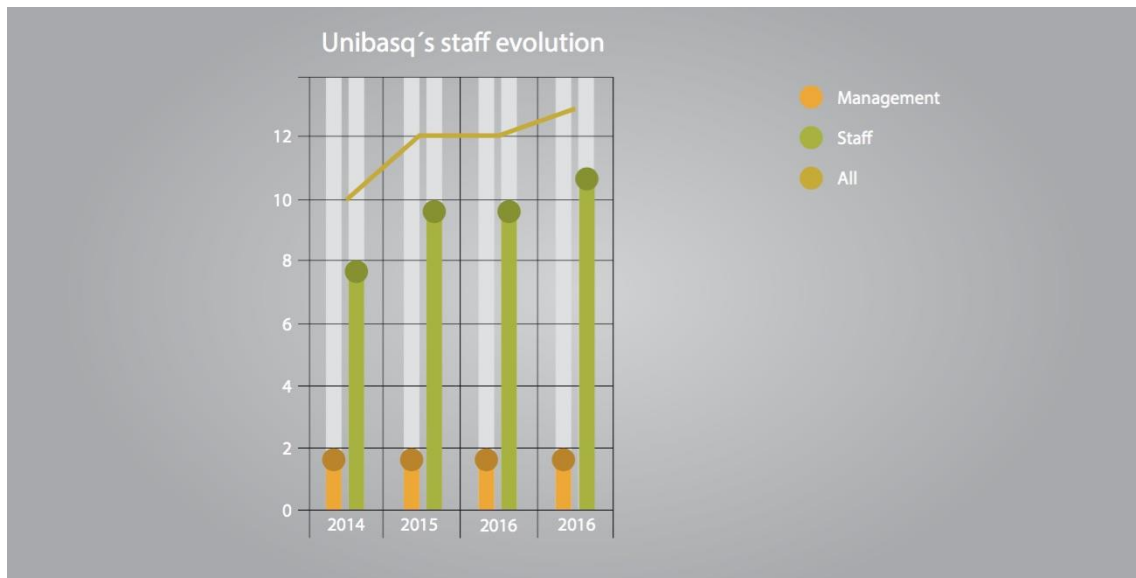


Figure 7. Unibasq own staff evolution 2014-2017.

Out of the 13 members of the staff, 3 are still temporary, but Unibasq intends to issue a public employment announcement, in order to stabilise its technical personnel (by hiring permanently one part-time and two full-time evaluation technical staff).

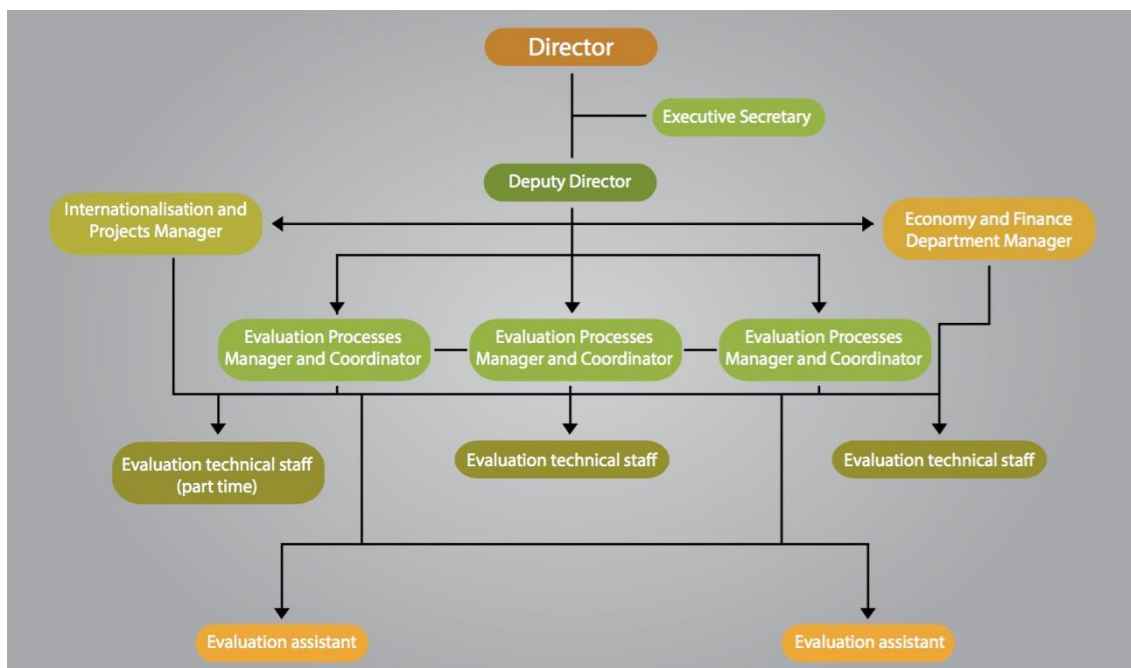


Figure 8. Unibasq organigram 2018.

Unibasq’s management believes that a key point in any successful project is to take care of the people involved in it. Therefore the Agency carries out annual satisfaction surveys that also make it possible to find out about the needs of personnel. Coordination meetings are also held regularly in order to better distribute the workload between all the persons involved.

External Staff

For the evaluation processes, Unibasq relies on experts of diverse profiles. The Agency has set up an online “[Database of Experts](#)”, an effective tool for the management and appointment of external experts involved in evaluation processes. The Evaluation Committees consist of academic, professional, and student members who have experience in the field of knowledge to be evaluated; in some cases, they also include international experts. As stated before in section 7, Unibasq and AQAS organised in 2017 two joint training sessions, one for experts who could speak Spanish in Germany and the other for experts who could speak German in the Basque Country. The following table shows the number of external persons involved in Unibasq’s activities over the past four years.

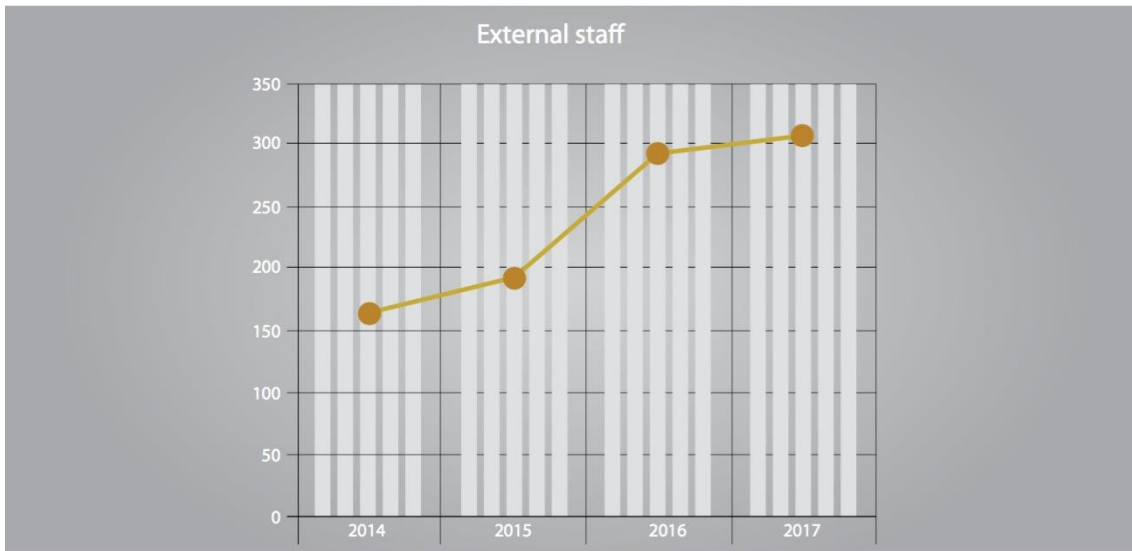


Figure 9. Unibasq external staff evolution 2014-2017.



Figure 10. International experts' location.

Information Systems

At the end of 2017, Unibasq presented a new website that included Unibasq Behatokia, the Observatory for the Activity in the Basque University System. The Observatory is a new digital tool that grants easy and fast access to general and detailed data about all Bachelor's and Master's degrees and Doctorate programmes available in public and private HEIs in the Basque Country (see Section 8.4).

In an effort to keep up with communication medias in society, Unibasq has opened accounts on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn at the beginning of 2018, thus offering a new path for the dissemination and publication of contents related to quality assurance evaluation in higher education and to other activities of the agency, both nationally and internationally.

Along the same lines, 2017 marked a milestone in the agency's efforts to maintain a central pool of data and information about the evaluation processes, with easy access and availability to all staff members.

In the past years, computer applications have been developed specifically in order to facilitate the evaluation processes for study programmes and institutions (AZTER), in complement of those already existing for teaching staff (EGIAZTAPENA, OSAGARRIAK...). These tools are under constant supervision and are adapted to the necessary changes.

Documentation services have gained importance in recent years. Therefore, the agency has supported digitalisation processes of those documents received in paper format, for which purpose Unibasq uses the software DOCUWARE, which enables the digitalisation and efficient management of paper documents used in the agency.

Finally, with regards to data protection laws, the automated files required for the management of information are registered with the Basque Data Protection Agency, in order to offer users the highest guarantee of privacy.

Facilities

Unibasq's headquarters, provided by the Basque Government Department in charge of universities, are located in the city centre of Vitoria-Gasteiz (c/ San Prudencio 8) and can easily be reached by public transport. The office space covers 328 m² and is divided into several areas: reception, management, offices and working areas, meeting rooms, computer room, archives and rest area.

8.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Unibasq's Act (Annex 2) establishes in its article 5 "Accountability" that the agency must be accountable to its internal bodies, to the Basque Government and more generally to society for the results of its work. In addition, one its current strategic objectives is the "Social diffusion of the agency activities and its role to improve the Basque University System".

All information about [Unibasq's Quality Policy](#) (Annex 4) is available on the website and demonstrates the commitment of the Agency to quality in every respect. As previously stated

(in section 6) Unibasq's internal quality assurance system is fully in line with the Advanced Management Model principles, achieved a diploma by Euskalit in 2017 and plans to undergo a complete external review following those principles in 2019. Unibasq adapted its processes to this model, evolving from an ISO 9001 approach in its early years to an advanced management approach since 2015, taking into account at the same time the new ESG 2015. In order to accommodate the new ESG, the agency has done some internal changes with a view to:

- Ensure that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically; for this reason, all persons involved in its activities are required to sign a declaration by which they adhere to its code of ethics and guarantees and declare the absence of any conflict of interests. As explained in Section 8.5, Unibasq has undergone a reorganization process to meet the new requirements set for it, redistributing the functions and appointing area coordinators. In addition, Unibasq makes sure that all its staff is properly trained and gives training opportunities based on the needs found.
- Include internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency; internal and external surveys are carried out regularly by Unibasq in order to gather information aimed at enhancing the agency's activities. Unibasq applies procedures and tools guaranteeing the periodic revision and continuous enhancement of its activity at several levels. For this purpose, the following have been defined:
 - A panel of indicators to monitor the implementation of Unibasq's Strategic Plan used in the periodic general revision of the Agency's actions in fulfilment of its mission.
 - A comprehensive meta-evaluation process, including surveys to everyone involved (with positive results), meetings with the presidents of the committees, meetings with the universities, etc., is in place for every evaluation procedure, in order to further improve it on the basis of an in-depth analysis and a review by the Advisory Board.
 - A fluid dialogue with the universities is maintained throughout the Agency's evaluation procedures. Meetings are held between the universities and the Agency staff involved (jointly and individually for each university). Moreover, every year Unibasq visits each of the 3 universities; during these meetings the outcomes of the last reviews are being discussed, universities' suggestions are sought and any updates on the procedures are communicated.
- Prevent intolerance of any kind or discrimination. Unibasq applies the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in its internal and external screening processes, in all selection processes for representatives and in all activities and accreditation procedures. For instance, gender equality/parity criteria are applied in the composition of the evaluation committees (see section 9.4). Moreover, Unibasq has created an Equality Committee to deal with this topic. Unibasq has a "working agreement" ("pacto de empresa" in Spanish) which regulates the working conditions of its staff.
- Outline appropriate communication channels with relevant authorities; for this purpose, periodic meetings are held with the HEIs and the Basque Government.
- Ensure that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG if some or all the elements in its quality assurance activities are

subcontracted to other parties. Currently, no quality assurance activities are subcontracted. The activities subcontracted by the Agency are limited to supporting roles (IT and logistics).

- Further promotion of the agency's status and recognition among the HEIs for whom it conducts external quality assurance activities.

Moreover, full information was given to the universities regarding the new ESG and their impact on the forthcoming evaluation procedures held by the agency. This change was also communicated to the external experts in all training sessions delivered by Unibasq and all staff was informed of the changes in a monographic coordination meeting.

8.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

Spanish legislation establishes that, as a requirement for the conduct of certain activities such as the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes or institutional accreditation, quality assurance Agencies "should be registered under EQAR after successfully passing an external evaluation in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education". In compliance with mandatory regulations, and also established in its own Law (Article 5.5), Unibasq undergoes its second external evaluation. The previous one took place in 2014. As commented before, Unibasq undergoes some other external reviews as the one regarding the Advanced Management Model principles (similar to EFQM) – conducted by Euskalit- where Unibasq achieved a diploma in 2017 and the certificate BIKAIN regarding the quality in the use of the Basque language.

9 Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)

9.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

When the last review was made, Unibasq was mainly performing voluntary procedures which were in line with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). This is why there was a specific recommendation regarding this issue. In the meantime, all external quality assurance procedures used by Unibasq take into account the effectiveness of HEIs' internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG. Unibasq's evaluation and analysis functions are planned and performed in order to help HEIs meet the requirements for internal quality assurance. If institutions improve their internal management processes, this enhances the whole Basque University System. As previously stated, this is completely in line with the quality culture already developed in the Basque Country.

1.1 Quality assurance policy

Unibasq requires that universities implement comprehensive quality assurance policies. This item is considered both in compulsory study programme evaluation procedures (ex-ante accreditation, modification, follow-up and ex-post accreditation) and in voluntary institutional evaluation procedures: DOCENTIA deals with quality assurance with respect to teaching staff, and AUDIT specifically reviews the internal quality assurance mechanisms developed by higher education centres and universities.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

This standard is reviewed in all compulsory study programme evaluation procedures, throughout all their stages (ex-ante accreditation, modification, follow-up and ex-post accreditation); the accreditation process, itself, consists of an external evaluation of particular study programmes. This is also addressed in the AUDIT procedure, "Quality assurance of the study programmes". In the DOCENTIA procedure, this aspect is addressed in the evaluation of the planning of teaching activities.

1.3. Student-focused teaching, learning and assessment

In the ex-ante evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, these aspects are reviewed as part of the criteria dealing with the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes. In the ex-ante evaluation of Doctoral programmes, they are reviewed when

assessing the educational activities, the programme organisation and achievement of the expected learning outcomes. In the follow-up and accreditation procedures, they are part of the review of delivery and performance indicators, and achievement of learning outcomes (respectively). As the case of AUDIT, this aspect is reviewed when assessing how the centre provides student-centred study programmes. In the case of DOCENTIA, it is part of the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

This standard is reviewed as part of the evaluation criteria for all types of study programmes when assessing the entrance profile required from applicants, the access procedures and the academic regulations applicable to the programme. In the case of the ex-ante evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, it is part of the review of the admission of students, while for Doctoral degrees it is included in the criterion dealing with students' access and admission. It is also a component of the ex-post evaluation, which contains specific guidelines regarding entrance profile and academic regulations.

With regard to AUDIT, this aspect is covered in the guidelines concerning how the Centre provides student-centred study programmes. This aspect does not fall within the scope of the DOCENTIA Procedure.

1.5 Teaching staff

In the case of programme evaluation procedures, during ex-ante accreditation, modification, follow-up and ex-post accreditation, the quality aspects referring to teaching staff are reviewed as part of the standard dealing with academic staff or human resources. In AUDIT this is examined when assessing how the Centre guarantees and enhances the quality of its academic staff. Regarding DOCENTIA, quality assurance of the teaching activity is the main focus of the procedure.

1.6 Learning resources and student support

This standard is analysed in the section on material resources and services. It applies to ex-ante accreditation, modification and follow-up assessment and ex-post accreditation. In the AUDIT procedure, this standard is evaluated when assessing how the Centre manages and improves its material resources and services. In the DOCENTIA procedure, it is checked as part of the guidelines dealing with methodology.

1.7 Information management

In all evaluations of study programmes (ex-ante accreditation, modification, follow-up and ex-post accreditation), this standard is reviewed as part of the Internal Quality Assurance System

and of the performance indicators. In the AUDIT procedure it is reviewed when assessing how the Centre analyses and takes into consideration its outcomes, and in the DOCENTIA procedure it is part of the quality review of outcomes.

1.8 Public information

All programme and institutional evaluation procedures ensure that Institutions publish the information required in each case on their activities and programmes. For study programmes, the procedures for ex-ante accreditation and for modifications evaluate it when looking into student information and admission, and the procedures for follow-up and ex-post accreditation include a standard about “Information and Transparency”. The AUDIT Procedure reviews how the Centre guarantees the publication of information on its study programmes and its accountability, and in the DOCENTIA Procedure it is reviewed when assessing the strategic and methodological dimensions.

1.9 Permanent monitoring and periodic evaluation of programmes

Programme and institutional evaluation procedures alike address the evaluation of this standard. The procedures for ex-ante accreditation and modification address it when reviewing the expected outcomes and the quality assurance system (for Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees) or when assessing the revision, enhancement and outcomes of the programme (for Doctoral programmes). During the follow-up stage, it is addressed as part of the evaluation of the Internal Quality Assurance System. For ex-post accreditation, this aspect is included in the criteria dealing with programme organisation and development and with Internal Quality Assurance. In the AUDIT Procedure it is examined when assessing how the Centre defines its policy and quality targets, and in DOCENTIA when analysing the methodological dimension.

1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Spanish law requires that programmes leading to an official university degree be subjected to an external evaluation process on a cyclical basis, as set forth in Royal Decree 1393/2007 and subsequent updates. The cycle includes ex-ante accreditation, monitoring/follow-up and ex-post accreditation. In the AUDIT and DOCENTIA procedures, the certification must be renewed every 5 years. This will be the same for the new institutional accreditation that is currently being introduced in Spain.

The alignment of Unibasq’s evaluation procedures and criteria with Part I of the ESG (2015) is summarised in the following table:

Table 11. Correlation between Unibasq's evaluation procedures and criteria and ESG part 1.

| ESG Part 1 | STUDY PROGRAMMES EVALUATION | | | | INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION | |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| | EX-ANTE ACCREDITATION | MODIFICATION (*) | FOLLOW-UP | ACCREDITATION RENEWAL | DOCENTIA | AUDIT |
| 1. Policy for quality assurance | 9 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1.0 |
| 2. Design and approval of programmes | 2, 5 & 8 | 2, 5 & 8 | *1 | *1 | 2 | 1.1 |
| 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment | 5 & 8 | 5 & 8 | 1 & 6 | 1 & 6 | 2 | 1.2 |
| 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification | 4 | 4 | 1.4 & 1.5 | 1.4 & 1.5 | NA | 1.2 |
| 5. Teaching staff | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 1, 2 & 3 | 1.3 |
| 6. Learning resources and student support | 7 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 1.4 |
| 7. Information management | 8 & 9 | 8 & 9 | 3 & 7 | 3 & 7 | 2 | 1.5 |
| 8. Public information | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 & 2 | 1.6 |
| 9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes | 8 & 9 | 8 & 9 | 1 & 3 | 1 & 3 | 2 | 1.1 |
| 10. Cyclical external quality assurance | *1 | *1 | *2 | *3 | *4 | *5 |

The numbers apply to the different specific criteria, guideline or dimension to be reviewed and can be found in section 5, under every specific procedure:

(*) In the modification procedure, the standards affected depend on the kind and depth of the planned changes.

(1*) The ex-ante accreditation procedure is the first stage in the life cycle of study programmes, in accordance with Royal Decree 1393/2007 and its subsequent updates. Modifications may occur at any moment of the life cycle of the programme. The ex-ante accreditation procedure evaluates various aspects of the design of study programmes regarding planning, intended learning outcomes and rules for student progress and retention.

(*2) The follow-up procedure for an official study programme requires that it undergoes a cyclical external evaluation process. This aspect is stated in the legal regulation currently in force in Spain, which includes Royal Decree 1393/2007 and its subsequent updates.

(*3) The ex-post accreditation ("accreditation renewal procedure") procedure requires that official university study programmes must undergo a cyclical external assessment process (every 4 years for Master's Degrees and 6 years for most of the Bachelor's Degrees (exceptionally every 7-8 years for those Bachelor degrees requiring 300-330 ECTS programmes) and for Doctorate programmes). This aspect is stated in the legal regulation currently in force in Spain, which includes Royal Decree 1393/2007 and its subsequent updates.

(*4) DOCENTIA. Certification must be renewed every 5 years.

(*5) AUDIT. The IQAS certification requires the renewal of the certificate every 5 years.

9.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The definition of the external evaluation procedures performed by the Agency is done mainly by Unibasq's Advisory Board, which defines their aims and objectives in accordance with Spanish and regional law and regulations. The Agency's technical staff prepares the draft documents for the procedures, before they are sent to the Advisory Board, which discusses and approves them.

The composition of this body is shown in Section 4. All stakeholders involved in higher education are represented on it: academics, students, professionals and international experts of the EHEA.

In addition, Unibasq holds periodic meetings with the institutions undergoing evaluation, in order to discuss with them the aims, objectives and procedures of the various evaluation procedures. The outcomes of these meetings are communicated to the Advisory Board.

The general structure of Unibasq's evaluation procedures (called "protocolos") always looks into aims and objectives, purpose, standards and guidelines, and evaluation methods.

All agreed procedures and criteria for evaluation are published on the Agency's webpage. The composition of the various Evaluation Committees is also published on the website.

In order to ensure that the procedures to be adopted fit their pre-defined purpose, the Agency has carried out pilot projects within the framework of the AUDIT (2013), Follow-Up (2010) and "Accreditation Renewal" (2014) procedures. The results of these pilot schemes have provided valuable information with regard to the identification of areas for improvement and of measures allowing the better achievement of the objectives of the processes. As mentioned before (See Section 8.4, under meta-evaluation reports), these pilots also help Unibasq improving its review procedures and finding synergies among them, which allows the Agency to keep as low as possible the evaluation burden imposed on applicant HEIs. A good example of this can be found in the ex-post accreditation procedure, where the outcomes of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA procedures are taken into account, which makes it possible to avoid that some items are reviewed twice.

Another important aspect of fitness for purpose is that for each type of evaluation Unibasq's staff carries out a periodic Meta-Evaluation in which the participants (Committees, HE institutions, applicants...) assess the adequacy and performance of the procedure and suggest improvements for the future. The key findings of this exercise are communicated to the Advisory Board, which analyses them and makes recommendations for the improvement of the evaluation procedures. For instance, after the reflection made related with procedures to measure of good teaching and methodologies, the procedures to evaluate programmes and IQAS of the universities have been updated. Also, after the summer course related with employability, the procedures focus more on practices or alumni strategy, among other aspects.

Moreover, these meta-evaluations, which are actually part of the thematic analyses carried out by the Agency, also help developing new procedures; this has been the case in particular of

the methodology for the evaluation of “Dual learning”, which was discussed during the Summer Course 2017 on graduates’ employability, where Unibasq presented the outcomes of an ECA working group about employability and external quality assurance.

9.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

One of the recommendations made in the former review was “Unibasq should reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation procedures”. At the time of the first ENQA Review of Unibasq, most of the Agency’s evaluation procedures were desk-based and did not include a site-visit.

Since 2015, after the registration in EQAR, Unibasq has achieved full competencies related with programme evaluation. This means that we are in charge of new evaluation procedures and new stages of the already in place evaluation procedures, like the ex-post accreditation of study programmes or the certification of implementation of the IQAS reviewed under the AUDIT procedure. Therefore, we have developed and/or renewed all procedures in order to make them more coherent among them, and also to line them up with the ESGs.

In fact, in the Basque University System, the internal quality systems are more developed than in the rest of Spain. Hence, we already have the highest participation in institutional accreditation.

All procedures developed by the Agency are displayed on the Agency’s website. As a rule, they include: a self-evaluation stage (self-evaluation or equivalent documentation, submitted by the institution on its behalf), the review by an assessment committee, and a report providing guidance for the actions to be taken by the institution. All of which is also published on the website. In the case of procedures comprising an implementation stage (ex-post accreditation, AUDIT and DOCENTIA procedures), the evaluation includes a site visit during which stakeholders are interviewed. Since all evaluations are made on a cyclical basis, there are follow-up procedures in place. For study programmes HEIs have to send a follow-up report to the Agency every year. In these reports they always have to provide information about how they are dealing with the recommendations from previous reviews.

Based on past recommendations from evaluation teams, Unibasq requires HEIs to provide in their SAR an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the programmes to be reviewed. A good example of this can be found in [Unibasq’s template for the SAR for ex-post accreditation](#), which is available on the Agency’s webpage.

Table 12. Unibasq evaluation procedures and types of activities held in each of them.

| Evaluation procedure | | SAR | External review | Site visit | Appeals | Report publication | Follow-up |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|-----------------|------------|---------|--------------------|-----------|
| Study programmes | Ex-ante accreditation | x | x | | x | x | x |
| | Modification | x | x | | x | x | x |
| | Follow-up | x | x | | | x | x |
| | Ex-post accreditation | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Institutional | AUDIT | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| | DOCENTIA | x | x | x | x | x | x |

Throughout all procedures, the Agency submits a provisional report to the applicant institution, so that the latter may make observations or factual corrections before the evaluation report is finalised. An appeal against the final report may be brought before the Committee for Ethics and Guarantees.

All review reports regarding implemented study programmes and institutions are published.

9.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

The evaluation processes are done by the various Evaluation Committees supported by Agency staff. One of the key elements of the quality assurance of evaluation processes resides in the qualification and selection of experts.

The general composition of the Evaluation committees is defined in Act 13/2012, governing Unibasq (see details in Section 4, Evaluation Committees). The Advisory Board has approved the requirements for the selection of experts (Annex 3), which are published on the Agency's website. The Advisory Board also analyses the experts' curricula and proposes members of the evaluation committees to the Director for their appointment. The actual composition of each evaluation committee always seeks a balanced participation regarding genders (at least 40% each), knowledge areas and geographical distribution. Unibasq has its own pool of experts open to academics, students and professionals. Nevertheless, in specific cases when experts from very specific areas or with very specific profiles are needed, contacts with other agencies are made to find them. In addition, in order to increase the number of experts available some specific calls to institutions or other bodies (professional associations...) are made.

All experts must sign a declaration in which they commit themselves to respect Unibasq's code of ethics and guarantees and declare that in case of any conflict of interest they will communicate it to the Agency in order to allow it to take the corresponding measures. Before any evaluation procedure takes place, the names of the participating experts are published on Unibasq's website; this allows the HEIs to submit any reservations or objections they may have.

Prior to the implementation of the evaluation activities, Unibasq provides the experts with briefing and training and, if necessary, further informative sessions are held at later stages of the evaluation processes. During this training process the agency provides the experts with information about evaluation management, guidelines for the preparation of evaluation reports, explanations about the evaluation guides, etc. On-line modules for the training of experts participating in the ex-post accreditation procedures are also available.

With regard to internationality, both the Governing Council and the Advisory Board include several international members in order to enhance the international dimension of evaluation processes and guarantee the European dimension of the Agency and its activities. In recent years Unibasq has made very significant efforts to involve international experts in Evaluation Committees; they are either Spanish nationals working abroad or foreigners that are proficient in the Spanish or Basque language. As said before, a good example of the endeavour to incorporate more international experts is the MoU signed with the German agency AQAS for specific training sessions in Bilbao for German speaking experts and in Cologne for Spanish speaking experts. Similar MoU have been signed with the French agencies HCERES and CTI, with a view to integrating more French experts in Unibasq's committees. Recently, a new MoU has also been signed with the German agency FIBAA. These cooperative initiatives have been very successful and the first experts from both countries who took part in the trainings are already working with Unibasq and AQAS.

Another major development at Unibasq is the special attention paid to the participation of students. The legal basis is the Basque Country Act 13/2012, which provides that Unibasq's evaluation committees include, among others, "students from the areas to be assessed, in the evaluation of programmes and activities that may have a direct impact on students; student members are nominated by the representative body of Basque university students". Students have actually participated in several of Unibasq's procedures, namely in DOCENTIA (since 2007), AUDIT (since 2012) and the evaluation of study programmes at all stages (since 2012).

In addition, students participate as full members in the Agency's Governing Council and Advisory Board since 2012 and in this way they are key actors in Unibasq's role in quality assurance in higher education. The Students Consultative Committee, created in 2015, has brought new ideas to the Agency, such as the recording of an easy-to-understand video explaining what the Agency is and what activities it does. Another positive development is that the voice of the students is always heard during Unibasq's annual Summer Courses, where they have their own session to debate on the specific topic of the event.

9.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

The rules for evaluation procedures and general evaluation criteria are always analysed, discussed and approved (with modifications if necessary) by the Agency's Advisory Board. They are then made public on the website before the implementation of each evaluation procedure.

For each evaluation procedure, Unibasq produces a document which sets out the procedure and criteria to be used. These documents are published on the Agency's webpage under every specific procedure and in a specific section regarding "Documentation". In addition, a summary of the criteria used in every procedure is available in section 5.

In order to ensure that the aforementioned procedures and criteria are applied in a coherent way, the following mechanisms are used:

- Documents for the orientation and guidance of the experts in the performance of their functions. Currently most evaluations are made through one of Unibasq's on-line platforms.
- Clear procedure for the selection of experts, guaranteeing that the experts meet the required profiles.
- Training sessions for the experts prior to each evaluation process. These sessions provide training on the procedure to be performed, the items to evaluate and the criteria to apply.
- Analysis and review of experts' conclusions and decisions by the Evaluation Committee, which issues the evaluation report as a joint document.
- Comparison of the evaluations made by different experts, in order to check that the evaluation criteria are being applied consistently. In case of divergence, the President of the Committee takes the necessary action to resolve the inconsistency.
- Assistance of the evaluation team by Agency staff during the whole process, in order to guarantee that the evaluation process fits the established criteria and procedure.

9.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

The evaluation reports are elaborated by the different Evaluation Committees. The structure of the reports follows the guides, templates, protocols and criteria established in advance. In general the reports are structured with an introduction (objectives of the report and description and analysis of the activities performed) followed by the main part containing the conclusions, commendations and recommendations for enhancement. The evaluation reports are always issued as common documents (on the basis of a consensus between all members of each Evaluation Committee) and must provide clear justifications for their conclusions; these must be phrased in constructive terms, explaining how the possible weak points may be improved. Before the final report is issued, the institution always has a chance to point out factual errors (cf. Section 9.7).

All review reports regarding implemented study programmes and institutions are published online (on Unibasq's webpage under the section showing specific procedures' results, i.e. [ex-post accreditation](#) and [AUDIT](#) procedures, on the [Observatory section under the specific study programme name](#) and will be on the [DEQAR database](#), as it is described in section 7 when talking about the DEQAR project).

At the end of the evaluation procedures, the Agency holds meetings with the respective applicant HEIs. The purpose of these meetings is to gather information about the usefulness of

the reports and to receive proposals for their improvement. Moreover, updates in the review procedures are presented periodically through workshops with the HEIs and their representatives for communication.

9.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

All processes involving evaluation activities, including appeals procedures are made public on [Unibasq's website](#). The names of the experts, who are part of the Evaluation Committees or panels, are made public before the evaluation procedures take place, which allows the evaluated institutions to submit to the Agency any observations or objections they may have.

The general procedure for appeals against the outcome of an evaluation procedure follows this pattern and is described in the documentation specific to each procedure, which is available online:

1. A draft evaluation report is issued by the corresponding evaluation committee.
2. The report is notified to the institution.
3. A period of usually 20 days is available for the institution to submit any claims or appeals, or to comment of factual errors.
4. The corresponding Evaluation Committee reviews the draft report taking into consideration any observation made by the HEI and a final evaluation report is produced.
5. When the formal decision belongs to the University Council (ex-ante and ex-post accreditation and modification procedures) Unibasq sends the final report, which is binding, to this Council. If the decision is negative, there exists an appeals procedure allowing the University Council to ask Unibasq to review the proposed decision. In this case, the president of Unibasq's study programmes evaluation committees issues an additional report. If the outcome is still negative, the HEI has the option to appeal the decision in Court, in accordance with the Spanish Act 29/1998 on Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction.
6. If there is no formal decision by the University Council, as in the case of AUDIT procedure, or in the case of a negative decision by Unibasq, the HEI may apply to the Ethics and Guarantees Committee.

As stated before, to further improve the appeals procedure, the former Ethics Committee became the Ethics and Guarantees Committee in 2016, following the recommendations made by ENQA and EQAR after the 2014 review process. This step means a very significant improvement over the previous practice.

Henceforward, the Ethics and Guarantees Committee is the body responsible for ensuring compliance with Unibasq's Code of Ethics and Guarantees. Specifically, its duty is:

- 1) To supervise the correct implementation, interpretation and application of the Code.

- 2) To evaluate and decide on observations or objections regarding the appointed Evaluation Committees' members that may be submitted to it under Article 13 of the Code.
- 3) To conduct periodic reviews of the implementation of both the Code and the Committee's Regulations, if necessary, and to communicate the results to the Governing Council.
- 4) To decide on appeals against certification and accreditation decisions, or evaluation reports issued by Unibasq that are based on a formal defect that damages any guarantees established in favour of the person or institution evaluated, or on a lack of impartiality by any person who intervened in the process. If the Committee decides to review the appeal, the consequence will be the declaration of nullity of the initial decision and the repetition of the appealed certification, accreditation or evaluation report. The procedure and grounds appeals are set out in Article 6 of the Regulations of the Ethics and Guarantees Committee referred to in Article 21 of the Code. It is important to bear in mind that Article 4.4 of the Law creating Unibasq 13/2012 provides that "The evaluation committees must act fully independently and the result of their assessments cannot be changed by any other body of the agency".
- 5) To report on the claims submitted for breach of the Code, which are based on any other reason than the ones specified in the previous paragraph. The procedure for bringing such claims is based on Article 7 of the Regulations of the Ethics and Guarantees Committee, in accordance with Article 21 of the Code.

For each of the procedures, the specific process is as follows:

- Ex-ante accreditation/modification: a provisional report is issued by the Evaluation Committee, which allows the university to make comments as deemed appropriate. Subsequently, pleas are reviewed by the committee, and a final report is issued. The Council of Universities (CU) renders the formal decision considering Unibasq's binding report. In the event of a negative report, the university may appeal to the Presidency of the CU within one month. If the claim is deemed admissible, it will be forwarded to Unibasq for assessment. Unibasq will send it to the Presidents of the Study programmes Evaluation Committees who will examine the aspects pointed to therein and will issue the pertinent report within a maximum of one month.
- Ex-post accreditation: Once Unibasq issues the provisional ex-post accreditation report, universities have 20 days to make pleas and/or attach an improvement plan to the report. Following this, the final ex-post accreditation report is issued, and the Council of Universities will render, according to the binding report by Unibasq, its decision. In the event of an unfavourable decision, the university may appeal within one month. If the appeal is accepted by the Council of Universities, Unibasq will send it to the Presidents of the Study programmes Evaluation Committees who will examine the aspects pointed to therein and will issue the pertinent report within a maximum of one month.
- DOCENTIA: Once the provisional DOCENTIA report has been issued by the assessment committee on the design, evaluation or certification phase of the DOCENTIA Procedure, the university may make observations to the provisional report; these will be studied by the Committee, and the Agency will proceed with the publication of the final DOCENTIA procedure report.

- **AUDIT:** The Agency will forward the report on the evaluation of the AUDIT Procedure to the applicant university. Each faculty will be entitled to make any comments to the results of the evaluation within 20 days. The submitted comments will be evaluated by the evaluation committee which, as appropriate, will include them in the report. Unibasq will forward a new version of the mentioned report.

In all the above procedures, in the event of any discrepancy, the university may appeal to the Agency. The Committee of Ethics and Guarantees will review the appeals made and take a decision. If the Committee finds a formal defect that damages any guarantees established in favour of the institution evaluated or in the case of the lack of impartiality by any person who intervened in the process, the consequence will be the declaration of nullity of the decision and the repetition of the appealed certification, accreditation or evaluation report.

In addition to the above procedures for claims and appeals, Unibasq has a more general procedure for the reception and handling of complaints and suggestions. Any individual or institution may make a complaint or suggestion either via the online contact form available on Unibasq's webpage or via e-mail. The Agency is committed to analysing all such communications and answering them.

10 Information and opinions of stakeholders

One of the recommendations of the previous review was that “Unibasq should consider how stakeholders’ involvement could be further increased in the development of procedures, next to their representation on the Advisory Board”. Since the last review, there has been a clear increase and improvement in the way Unibasq involves stakeholders in its operations and communication. As a result, the current Strategic Plan includes a specific line dealing with “Social Influence: Communication, Collaboration with Institutions, Quality Agencies and Social Agents”, with the following objectives:

- Social dissemination of the Agency’s activities and its role in improving the Basque University System.
- Increase of collaboration with the Basque socio-economic environment, especially in order to promote the participation of society in institutional and study-programmes consultancy and evaluation processes.
- Promotion of students’ participation in decisions and evaluation processes, in order to improve higher education in line with their needs.
- Stronger presence and influence in organizations and networks dealing with quality in higher education, especially within the Spanish context (REACU).

The ways in which the opinions of Unibasq’s main stakeholders are gathered and used can be seen in the following table. Some of the actions that should be highlighted for the improvement of communication with stakeholders are:

- Creation of the Students Consultative Committee, which has increased the involvement of student representatives on Unibasq’s main bodies. As part of this initiative, training activities for students about quality assurance in Higher Education are held twice a year. Moreover, the [video](#) presenting Unibasq’s activities was their idea.
- Meetings and agreements with key social agents in order to gather their suggestions about the Basque University System, and consider them as a source for potential experts. Contacts with [Euskalit](#), [Ikerbasque](#), [Innobasque](#), [Fundación Novia Salcedo](#) and [Confebask](#) are being increased in order to identify more collaboration opportunities.
- Webpage update, including for the Observatory of the Basque University System
- More accounts in social media (LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter).
- More public appearances presenting the agency’s role and activity. Main recent events were presentations of the Observatory of the Basque University System and of the outcomes of the review of the new “dual learning” programmes that will be offered in the Basque University System from the year 2018-2019.

The stakeholders participate actively in the thematic analysis that we make in Unibasq. In this sense, they always participate with some conferences or round tables in the summer courses, related with the specific topics of interest. For instance, from the discussion with students we gathered very good ideas for the Observatory ([Behatokia](#)) and the projection

of the agency. In addition, the employers provided very good insight to design the protocol to review dual learning. Apart from the workshops, the periodical meetings with professionals and students are very useful to get their point of view, interests and needs.

Table 13. Unibasq main stakeholders and communication channels.

| Unibasq main stakeholders | | Communication channels |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Internal stakeholders | Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • Coordination meetings • Surveys |
| | Experts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In person meetings • Meta-evaluation meetings • Surveys |
| | Members of different bodies (Governing and Advisory Boards) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • Meetings of the different bodies |
| External stakeholders | Basque HEIs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings • Visits to the HEIs • Participation in workshops • Surveys |
| | Basque Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Follow-up Commission of the programme-contract |
| | Academic staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • Surveys • Specific workshops |
| | Students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students consultative Committee • Trainings for students • Meetings of the different bodies and committees |
| | QAAs – networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in the periodic events and meetings of the networks (REACU, INQAAHE, ENQA, ECA) • Participation in working groups • Participation in EU funded projects • Specific collaborations |
| | Allies (Euskalit, Ikerbasque, Confebask, Fundación Novia Salcedo...) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration agreements • Periodic meetings • Joint review MGA-AUDIT (Euskalit –Unibasq) • Quality Innovation Award with Euskalit (University mention) |
| | Society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observatory of the Activity of the BUS • Survey to companies • Regular participation of Unibasq Director in different fora: Tribuna Forum Europa, Club Roma,... • Press releases • Social media and website • Workshops and summer courses |

11 Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's response.

Table 14. Recommendations and main findings from previous review and agency's resulting follow-up.

| Recommendations | Actions for improvement |
|---|---|
| 1. Unibasq should re-evaluate whether the assessment of students could be evaluated more systematically within the different evaluation procedures. | Since the last external review, new evaluation procedures have been adopted. The assessment of students is evaluated systematically in our current evaluation procedures. See section 9.1. |
| 2. Unibasq should focus its mandatory evaluation procedures more on the compliance of the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions with Part I of the ESG. | Unibasq's mandatory evaluation procedures consider the effectiveness of HEIs' internal quality assurance system as described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (See Section 9.1.) |
| 3. Unibasq should consider how stakeholders' involvement could be further increased in the development of procedures, next to their representation in the Advisory Board. | <p>Different activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Students Consultative Board. Training sessions for students • Agreements with various Basque organisations • Regular visits to HEIs • Professionals appointed as members of an increasing number of evaluation committees • Annual Summer courses • Participation in several European/international projects |
| 4. Unibasq should reconsider its procedures in order to introduce the full review model in a broader range of evaluation procedures. | The full review model, that was not yet fully developed in 2014, is now being at different stages of the study programmes evaluation procedures (Ex-ante accreditation, follow-up-modification, ex post renewal of accreditation) and in the institutional evaluation procedures (AUDIT and DOCENTIA). These evaluation procedures are organised on a cyclical basis where the full review model is applied in stages, i.e. in a sequence including self-evaluation, site visit, draft report, final report, and follow-up. |
| 5. Unibasq should continue to monitor that the self-evaluation reports are of a self-critical nature. | <p>Unibasq sees it as crucial for the fulfilment of its own mission to foster a more self-critical approach in HEIs' self-evaluation reports. Several steps in this direction have been taken for the follow-up and accreditation renewal evaluation procedures and they have generated positive results, as can be seen from some universities' self-evaluation reports. A good example is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor in Biology (Faculty of Science and Technology, UPV/EHU) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Follow-up self-evaluation report ○ Accreditation renewal self-evaluation report <p>In addition, in the AUDIT and DOCENTIA evaluation procedures, applicant universities have to develop their own action plans for improvement. Good examples of this can be found in their annual management reports, e.g. in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual management report (2016/2017) Faculty of Science and Technology (UPV/EHU) |

6. Unibasq should initiate a review of the DOCENTIA procedures in order to reduce the administrative burden of this evaluation scheme in cooperation with other Spanish agencies.

In Unibasq's strategic plan, the promotion of the DOCENTIA evaluation procedure done in collaboration with the other Spanish QA agencies is a specific objective. The aim is that by the end of the 2016-2019 period, 50% of the Basque University System academic staff should be accredited under the DOCENTIA scheme. Hence, Unibasq will continue supporting the three universities in the SUV in their effort to develop this procedure.

Unibasq also produced an internal guide aimed at reducing some of the unnecessary administrative burden put on HEIs - even though the simplification of procedures is not in the hands of Unibasq alone, but depends on all Spanish agencies involved.

7. Unibasq should integrate the key findings leading to conclusions more explicitly in its reports.

Unibasq's evaluation reports gather the compliance of applicants with the various criteria, recommendations and good practices in QA. This may be seen for example in the published reports for the ex-post accreditation and monitoring of study programmes:

<https://www.unibasq.eus/es/titulos-renovacion-acreditacion/informes-upv-ehu/>

<https://www.unibasq.eus/es/titulos-seguimiento/informes-seguimiento-upv-ehu/>

Unibasq's evaluation reports pay particular attention to the justification of their conclusions for the benefit of the applicant HEIs. All related information (legal framework, evaluation criteria and guidelines) is available on Unibasq's website. It was already mentioned earlier in this SAR that until now the Agency has mainly focused its reporting efforts on the suggestions and recommendations, which are the key to continuous improvement and therefore the main purpose of Unibasq's approach to quality assurance.

When the institutional accreditation procedure based on the new Royal Decree 420/2015 about the creation, recognition, authorisation and accreditation of universities and university centres comes into force, university centres will have a possibility to apply for institutional accreditation – provided the implementation of their IQAS in line with the ESG has been certified and 50% of their bachelor and 50% of their master degrees are fully accredited. For this institutional accreditation a report gathering the findings of all previous review reports for the Centre and its degrees will be issued. With this kind of report the Agency will have a new opportunity to making all conclusions more explicit and emphasise improvement measures.

8. Unibasq should consider broadening the intended readership of its reports.

In order to further broaden its audience, and as a key objective of both its new strategic plan and its multi-annual programme contract, Unibasq has set up the Observatory of the Basque University System's Activity. The Observatory gathers and publishes information about the quality of the Basque University System. The main aim is to provide all stakeholders (future students, families, employers, and society at large) with comprehensive information about the quality of study programmes and institutions – including by means of the publication of the review relevant reports. The various training activities for students that have already been mentioned are also expected to further improve the understanding of the evaluation reports.

Another important factor is that the evaluation reports are henceforward published in a context where the applicable legislation, the evaluation criteria and relevant additional information are all easily available on the same site. The evaluation reports for the accreditation renewal gather all the above information.

9. Unibasq should use the general findings of its external quality assurance processes more as a basis for system-wide analyses on the Basque University System.

As stated above in the response to Recommendation 8, one of the key objectives of both the new strategic plan and the multi-annual programme contract is the development of the Observatory of the Basque University System's Activity. Unibasq created the Observatory in order to collect and publish information about the quality of the Basque University System. When it is fully developed Unibasq will have a unique tool for system-wide analyses that will be useful to all stakeholders and will facilitate the dialogue between universities, government and society.

See Section 8.4 for more information about "Thematic analysis" at system level.

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| <p>10. Unibasq should try to diversify its income in order to become less dependent from the Basque Government funding.</p> | <p>The new financing model of the Agency by the Basque Government came eventually into operation in 2016. The special feature of this system is that it links guaranteed funding to the fulfilment of certain objectives, thanks to the signature of a multi-annual programme-contract with the Basque Government. The Governing Board approved the programme-contract based on the Agency's new Strategic Plan 2016-2019. It is an important new tool for the improvement of the quality of the Agency in all its activity areas. It allows the progressive development of actions to achieve the objectives contained in the Strategic plan while ensuring at the same time the Agency's funding autonomy. Besides Basque Government funding, the agency also collects fees for certain evaluation procedures: while the compulsory evaluation of study programmes and institutions are free, the individual evaluation of academic staff carries a fee for every application. Other sources of income are expected to be the participation of Unibasq in EU-funded projects and in QA reviews of universities from other countries.</p> <p>The multi-annual programme contract is also a tool for the Europeanisation and internationalisation of Unibasq, in line with the new Strategic plan. It endorses the Agency's priorities in these areas, in particular its intention to play an active role within ENQA, to undertake joint activities with foreign universities and institutions and to participate actively in international seminars and meetings. It has also made it possible for Unibasq to fund the new staff position of "Internationalisation and Projects Manager". In addition, since October 2016, Unibasq's Director is a member of the Board of ENQA and since June 2018, Unibasq's Internationalisation and Projects Manager became a member of the Board of ECA.</p> |
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| <p>11. Unibasq should make its mid-term ambitions and the direction it wants to head to more explicit.</p> | <p>As a conclusion of a broad and inclusive reflection process, the Governing Council approved the Strategic Plan of Unibasq (2016-2019) at the end of 2015. It includes 4 strategic lines on which the agency is focussing during these four years:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services: Consultancy and Assessment 2. Social Influence: Communication, Collaboration with Institutions, Quality Agencies and Social Agents 3. Agency's Internationalisation Backing the Basque University System 4. Internal Organization, Management, Planning and Human Resources <p>In this link to the Unibasq Strategic Plan 2016-2019 the objectives and the related activities and indicators can be found. As explained before, this new Strategic Plan underpins the multi-annual programme-contract signed with the Basque Government. The special feature of this new financing model is that it links guaranteed funding with the fulfilment of certain objectives. Hence, the Strategic Plan and the programme-programme are tools that make Unibasq's medium-term ambitions more explicit while at the same time defining objective-related indicators for their monitoring.</p> |
| <p>12. Unibasq should stimulate programmes and institutions more to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in the presented self-evaluation reports.</p> | <p>Unibasq sees it as crucial for the fulfilment of its own mission to foster a more self-critical approach in HEIs' self-evaluation reports. Several steps in this direction have been taken for the follow-up and accreditation renewal evaluation procedures and they have generated positive results, as can be seen from some universities' self-evaluation reports. A good example is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor in Biology (Faculty of Science and Technology, UPV/EHU) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Follow-up self-evaluation report ○ Accreditation renewal self-evaluation report <p>In addition, in the AUDIT and DOCENTIA evaluation procedures, applicant universities have to develop their own action plans for improvement. Good examples of this can be found in their annual management reports, e.g. in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual management report (2016/2017) Faculty of Science and Technology (UPV/EHU) |

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| <p>13. Unibasq should reconsider whether the site-visits could be useful in other steps of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA schemes and in other quality procedures.</p> | <p>The full review model, that was not yet fully developed in 2014, is now being at different stages of the study programmes evaluation procedures (Ex-ante accreditation, follow-up-modification, ex post renewal of accreditation) and in the institutional evaluation procedures (AUDIT and DOCENTIA). These evaluation procedures are organised on a cyclical basis where the full review model is applied in stages, i.e. in a sequence including self-evaluation, site visit, draft report, final report, and follow-up.</p> |
| <p>14. Unibasq should clarify the procedures for comments on the preliminary reports and establish formal appeal procedures.</p> | <p>In the case of study programmes and institutional accreditation, Unibasq does not issue a formal resolution. The Evaluation Committee issues a preliminary report which is communicated to the interested party. Then a period for the submission of observations is opened. Finally, the report is reviewed taking into account these observations and a final evaluation report is issued. The same as all other Spanish QA agencies, Unibasq does not make the formal decision, which is a competence of the national University Council. If there is a negative decision, there exists an appeal procedure allowing the University Council to ask Unibasq to review it. In this case, the presidents of Unibasq Study programmes evaluation committees issue a special report. If the final outcome is still negative, the institutions have the option to present an appeal in Court, in accordance with Act 29/1998 on Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction.</p> <p>In order to further improve Unibasq's appeals procedure, the Agency's Ethics Committee became the Ethics and Guarantees Committee, which is responsible for supervising the correct implementation of Unibasq's evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures and the correct application of its Ethics and Guarantees code. This Committee could in certain cases cancel an evaluation procedure, which would then have to be made again - but the Committee does not have the power to reassess the application. The reasons for such cancellations may be that the Committee finds that the impartiality of all experts was not guaranteed or that some defence rights were denied during the procedure.</p> |
| <p>15. Unibasq should receive resources in order to play an active role within ENQA.</p> | <p>The new financing model of the Agency by the Basque Government came eventually into operation in 2016. The special feature of this system is that it links guaranteed funding to the fulfilment of certain objectives, thanks to the signature of a multi-annual programme-contract with the Basque Government. The Governing Board approved the programme-contract based on the Agency's new Strategic Plan 2016-2019. It is an important new tool for the improvement of the quality of the Agency in all its activity areas. It allows the progressive development of actions to achieve the objectives contained in the Strategic plan while ensuring at the same time the Agency's funding autonomy. Besides Basque Government funding, the agency also collects fees for certain evaluation procedures: while the compulsory evaluation of study programmes and institutions are free, the individual evaluation of academic staff carries a fee for every application. Other sources of income are expected to be the participation of Unibasq in EU-funded projects and in QA reviews of universities from other countries.</p> <p>The multi-annual programme contract is also a tool for the Europeanisation and internationalisation of Unibasq, in line with the new Strategic plan. It endorses the Agency's priorities in these areas, in particular its intention to play an active role within ENQA, to undertake joint activities with foreign universities and institutions and to participate actively in international seminars and meetings. It has also made it possible for Unibasq to fund the new staff position of "Internationalisation and Projects Manager". In addition, since October 2016, Unibasq's Director is a member of the Board of ENQA and its Internationalisation and Projects Manager became Board member of ECA in June 2018. This has obviously further improved the relationship and the alignment of the agency with ENQA. Taking part in international projects is another way for Unibasq's international projection and its collaboration with ENQA and other networks.</p> |

12 SWOT analysis and current challenges and areas for further development

Before the current Strategic plan (2016-2019) was drafted, a SWOT analysis of Unibasq was made with the participation of staff, representatives from the Agency's different bodies and some external experts. Most of the items detected as weaknesses and opportunities were addressed in this exercise and specific objectives were identified as strategic lines, together with key actions for their achievement and specific indicators for their monitoring.

As stated in section 8.1, these objectives are developed into specific activities in the annual management plans that are publicly available. Every year the fulfilment of the annual plan is reviewed and most of the issues have already been identified, taken into account and solved.

Since a new Strategic Plan will need to be drawn up in 2019, Unibasq has taken the reflection and consultation process for the present SAR as an opportunity to start a new SWOT analysis. The provisional outcome is shown below. The Agency reserves its right for its decision-making bodies to make any changes to it before it becomes part of the next Strategic Plan and the next programme-contract.

Strengths:

- Support and trust from the Basque University System and Basque government. This can be seen in the positive participation of Basque universities and students in Unibasq's bodies and activities such as training and summer courses, and in the multiannual Programme-Contract with the Basque Government
- Qualified and dedicated staff at all levels.
- Proactive role and influence in Spain via the REACU network of QA agencies.
- Active participation in European activities, networks, projects, which makes Unibasq fully aware of other QA systems and international trends.
- Full membership in ENQA and EQAR, which allows Unibasq to be a fully-fledged QA agency in Spain and internationally.

Weaknesses:

- Rigid regulation of QA in Spain, which favours conformity and hinders innovativeness, both at the level of HEIs and of QA agencies.
- Insufficient presence in Social media, and scarce interest of young people except for activities meant specifically for them.
- Limited presence in society at large.

Opportunities:

- Structure and quality of the Basque University System with its three quite different, but strongly committed universities that take quality and internationalisation very

seriously, which encourages the development of more cooperation with other regional innovation bodies such as Euskalit, etc.

- Further reorientation of the Spanish QA system towards institutional accreditation; if not over-regulated at national level by a new Royal Decree, this could open new perspectives for innovation at HEIs and a pro-active, less cumbersome role of QA agencies.
- Development of quicker and stronger links with the students' representation bodies in the Basque Country, thanks to their good organisation and goodwill.
- Better involvement of stakeholders and internal bodies in the organisation of public activities such as workshops, congresses, trainings... at regional / national and international level.
- Involvement of Unibasq in the development of European quality seals in certain professional areas and cross-border accreditation.

Threats:

- Recurrent over-regulation of Spanish higher education and QA system that slows down the adaptation of universities, programmes and QA to rapid change in society and the economy; the rigid regulation and frequent changes in it create obligations that tend to be too formal and bureaucratic, to enforce compliance and to inhibit innovation.
- Risk of not being seen as useful by current and future students, because of the hurdles on the direct communication lines with them
- Overload resulting from externally-imposed bureaucracy that may also damage the Agency's image as an efficient partner in the development of higher education.

Regarding current challenges and areas for further development, the following ones are our main priorities:

- Development of an institutional accreditation procedure (in a second stage), that doesn't mean more workload to the HEIs.
- Development of labels – reviews at study programme and institutional level. There is a new initiative included in the new Basque Decree 274/2017 of December 19th, regarding the implementation and closure of official study programmes (Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees and Doctoral Studies) where it is established that the Basque official study programmes will be classified in different levels under these categories: 1. Innovative methodologies based training; 2. Internationalisation; and 3. Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations. As stated before, Unibasq has already developed the methodology for reviewing "Dual learning", linked to the last of the categories "Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations. In addition, labels at institutional level could be developed in areas regarding research, knowledge transfer, social responsibility, internationalisation...
- Increase of external collaborations, national and international (for example, the Quality Innovation Award with Euskalit).
- Staff for all diversified activities, as international activities.

13 Annexes

1. Strategic Plan of Unibasq (2016-2019)
2. Act 13/2012, of 28 June 2012, governing Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System.
3. Procedure for the selection of experts and specific requirements
4. Unibasq Quality Policy
5. Unibasq Quality Handbook