

REACU

Spanish Network
of Quality Assurance Agencies in
Higher Education

EVALUATION PROTOCOL FOR MODIFICATION of Higher Education study plans leading to the achievement of University official Bachelor and Master degrees

In accordance with the provisions in Royal Decree 822/2021, 28
September, on the organisation of Higher Education and the
procedure for its quality assurance

Approved by REACU on 17 January, 2022

STUDY PLANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The university degrees study plans constitute the commitment of the institution on the degree characteristics and the conditions for the education development, which provide the defined educational academic project.

Royal Decree 822/2021, 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for its quality assurance, defines the **guiding principles** in study plans and their **structure** which include, among other aspects, the intended educational objectives, knowledge, and contents, the competencies and skills which characterise them and the external academic practices which reinforce the educational project and the assessment system to review learning achievement by the students enrolled in a degree.

In accordance with article 4 in Royal Decree 822/2021, REACU defined on 13 January, 2022, the General Evaluation Protocol in quality assurance for verification of study plans leading to the achievement of University official Bachelor and Master degrees.

STUDY PLANS MODIFICATION

The general procedure for **modification** of study plans in official Higher Education provided at university centres aims to continuous improvement. Modifications are classified into **substantial** or **non-substantial**, according to the type of modification with regard to nature, objectives and fundamental characteristics of the degree registered in the Register for Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT).

- **Substantial modifications** are requested to the Council for Universities. The corresponding quality assurance agency will issue a review report, by applying a procedure similar to the verification process. In case of study plans delivered at institutionally accredited centres, the proposal must include a reasoned report on the academic adequacy and the normative regulating substantial modification in the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) at the centre or university.
- With regard to **non-substantial modifications**, if the study plans are provided at institutionally accredited centres, they will require a report issued by their IQAS and the submission of the modified study plan report to the competent quality assurance agency and the corresponding Autonomous Community or Communities, whereas if study plans are offered at centres without institutional accreditation, they will require approval by the university governing body and a previous report issued by the IQAS, submission to and acceptance by the competent agency.

The articles from 30 to 33 in Royal Decree 822/2021, regulate the general procedures for modification of study plans, according to the above-mentioned casuistry. Specially, article 30.4 in the mentioned Royal Decree points out: "Quality assurance agencies will jointly provide the general criteria to delimit the types of changes included in the degree study plan report which are subject to be considered as not substantial". This requirement is also included in the rest of

articles mentioned above (specially in articles 31.3, 32.6 and 33.6). Additionally, article 32.2 provides a series of aspects that affect the nature, objectives and characteristics of the degree which will subject to substantial modification.

OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

This REACU Protocol aims to establish the general harmonised action criteria for evaluation applied by the agencies within the framework of the general procedure for Modification, by providing the general guidelines that REACU agencies will develop in their respective specific Protocols and/or Guides to Evaluation.

In this regard, the general criteria are provided to delimit the type of changes in a study plan report which are subject to be considered as non-substantial, and the aspects that will be subject to substantial modification are also agreed, among which will be at least considered the issues established in article 32.2 of Royal Decree 822/2021.

ALIGNMENT WITH ESG

The configuration and terminology used in the study plan report must be in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which will be the reference for the Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) at universities and the procedures for external review conducted by the quality assurance agencies within the Spanish university system, registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, (EQAR).

Therefore, social trust in the rigour and strength of university degrees is reinforced, facilitating their continuous improvement, to strengthen the employability capacity and appropriate labour market integration of graduates, in addition to international recognition of Spanish university degrees and the development of international joint degrees.

STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS IN STUDY PLANS	STANDARDS ESG
1. Degree description, educational objectives and justification	1.2. Design and approval of programmes
2. Learning outcomes and training process results	
3. Admission, recognition and mobility	1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
4. Education planning	1.3. Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment
5. Academic staff and student support staff	1.5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources: material resources and infrastructures, practices and services	1.6. Learning resources and student support

7. Implementation timeline	
8. Internal Quality Assurance System	1.1. Policy for quality assurance
	1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
	1.7. Information management
	1.8. Public information
	1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance

DIMENSIONS, STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

Substantial modifications in study plans will be reviewed by the competent quality assurance agency by applying a procedure similar to the verification process of study plans, in accordance with REACU General Protocol for verification of study plans in Higher Education leading to the achievement of official Bachelor and Master degrees.

With regard to not substantial modifications in the study plans taught at university centres which are not institutionally accredited, they will be valued for their acceptance by the competent agency.

The catalogue including substantial modifications is provided below, that is, each one of the dimensions for evaluation, as well as the aspects that will be considered as substantial modification and will affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

Nevertheless, if according to the university proposal, the corresponding agency considers the modifications requested imply the design of a new degree, the agency will issue a report declining the requested modifications and urging the verification of a new degree.

1. Degree description, educational objectives and justification

With regard to this dimension, the aspects listed below will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Partial modification in degree denomination.
2. Change with regard to the number of vacancies offered-
3. Incorporation or modification of mentions, specialities and their credits distribution.
4. Change in learning modalities: face-to-face, hybrid and virtual.
5. Change of the centre providing the degree.
6. Changes in Bachelor degrees workload from 180 ECTS to 240 ECTS (first transitory disposition in RD 822), and changes in official Master degrees to include 60, 90 or 120 ECTS (sixth transitory disposition in RD 822).

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

2. Learning outcomes and training process results

With regard to this dimension, the aspects listed below will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Drafting changes on the learning outcomes that affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.
2. Elimination or inclusion of the learning outcomes that affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

3. Admission, recognition and mobility

With regard to this dimension, the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Incorporation, elimination or change in complementary training.
2. Changes in the criteria for ECTS credits transfer and recognition.
3. Changes in the admission requirements.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

4. Education planning

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects that affect planning in other dimensions, with regard to this dimension the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. The areas and subjects distribution on basic training and compulsory education.
2. The change on the number of credits awarded in the final Bachelor or Master thesis.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

5. Academic staff and student support staff

With regard to this dimension, the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Changes in the number and/or profile of teaching staff and student support staff required and available that might affect the appropriate development of the study plan.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

6. Learning resources: material resources and infrastructures, practices and services

With regard to this dimension, the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Changes in the available infrastructures and/or supporting resources that might affect the study plan development.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

7. Degree Implementation timeline

With regard to this dimension, the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Significant changes in the degree implementation timeline.
2. Changes in the adaptation process of students coming from former programmes.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.

8. Internal Quality Assurance System

With regard to this dimension, the following aspects will be subject to **substantial modification**:

1. Changes that affect IQAS model or structure.

The rest of modifications proposed will be considered as **non-substantial modifications** whenever they do not affect the degree nature, objectives and characteristics.