

REACU

Spanish Network
of Quality Assurance Agencies in
Higher Education

EVALUATION PROTOCOL FOR VERIFICATION 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 January 13rd, 2022

STUDY PLANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The study plans for university degrees 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 are pursued to be achieved, the external academic practices which reinforce the educational project and the assessment system to review the learning achieved by the students enrolled in a degree.

The study plan structure is completed with the description of academic and supporting staff, learning resources and the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), and it must be adjusted to the model **report** provided for the application for verification of a study plan of a university official Bachelor or Master degree, established in Annex II of the above-mentioned Royal Decree.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF STUDY PLANS

Study plans structure the educational objectives in an official university degree, the intended knowledge and contents provided, the competencies and skills which characterise them and which are intended to be achieved, the external academic practices that reinforce their educational project and the assessment system to review the learning achieved by the students enrolled in a degree.

In accordance with the provisions in article 4 of Royal Decree 822/2021, the general principles which must inspire the university official degrees are:

- the academic rigour of the educational project which implies university education.
- consistency with the generalist or specialised aspect of the cycles in which education is inscribed.
- consistency between the study plan educational objectives, the intended fundamental competencies and the systems provided for the assessment of the learning outcomes achieved by students.
- social understanding.

Likewise, these study plans must have as reference the democratic principles and values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These values and objectives must be included as transversal contents or competencies, in the format decided by the centre or university, within the different official education delivered, if applicable, and taking always into consideration their specific academic nature and the intended learning objectives in each degree.

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 referent for the Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) at universities and the procedures for external review provided 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, and it allows 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

1. Degree description, educational objectives and justification

The degree includes a consistent description which is appropriate to its level, or academic effects, so as to there is not confusion with regard to its content, scope, and, if applicable, academic and professional effects.

- The degree **denomination** must be clearly consistent with the study plan, the educational objectives established and its level in the Spanish Qualifications Framework in Higher Education (MECES), without causing confusion.
- The degree **academic field** must fulfil the academic consistency with the modules, subjects, areas and subjects which substantially encompass the basic training developed in the study plan.
- If applicable, the included **mentions or specialities** define a clear academic itinerary which complete the general academic project with a clear thematic or professional curricular intensification, with the number of credits appropriate to the regulatory framework.
- The learning and teaching **modality** is appropriate to the degree educational objectives, which gives meaning to the face-to-face option, virtual and/or hybrid, with a percentage of distance credits according to the regulatory framework.
- The total number of **credits** is in accordance with the normative.
- The **number of vacancies offered** is consistent with the available resources provided for learning, as well as academic and support staff.
- The degree must be **justified** with regard to its academic, scientific, professional and social interest, supported by internal and external consultation, its integration in the institutional strategic planning and the context, tradition, and global offer of degrees, as well as the provider university or universities in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
- The **educational objectives** that define the degree must be clear and explicit, in line with the degree justification and its MECES level.
- If applicable, the objectives of **specific curricular structures** included in educational planning respond to determined demands by society, on-going transformation and the need for new scientific, technological and humanistic knowledge, and they are consistent with the degree intended educational objectives.
- If applicable, the specific **methodological strategies on teaching innovation** facilitate the achievement of educational objectives and they convey the degree global character.
- The intended **Graduate profiles** in the degree must be clearly defined, including, if applicable, the effects on the practice of regulated professional activities.

2. Learning outcomes and training process results

The learning and teaching outcomes, specified as knowledge or contents, competencies and skills or abilities to be achieved by students, must be assessable and in line with those ones designed for awarding the degree and with the qualifications framework established in the European Higher Education Area.

- The learning and teaching outcomes proposed in the degree must be clearly and appropriately issued, as well as aligned with MECES level.
- They must be consistent with the degree denomination, academic field, the educational objectives and graduation profiles.
- The learning and teaching outcomes proposed in the degree must be assessable and guarantee their acquisition by all the students.
- In case of degrees awarding professional qualifications required for the practice of regulated professional activities, the learning and teaching outcomes must include or display consistency with the competencies provided in the corresponding ministerial regulation.

3. Admission, recognition and mobility

The degree must provide accessible regulatory systems including clear information on access requirements, admission procedures, as well as on credits recognition, transfer and mobility.

- Access requirements including, if applicable, specific access tests, must meet the legislation into force.
 - If the programme is designed to be lectured in a foreign language, the information concerning the required level of proficiency to study the degree must be provided to the students whose mother tongue is not the language of provision, in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) .
- The admission requirements, including if applicable specific admission criteria, must be published and comprise academic aspects, clearly described in order to avoid confusion, and they must be consistent with the degree academic field.
 - If the admission criteria include complementary training, it must be appropriate to the programme knowledge field and consistent with the admission requirements.
- The regulatory framework on credits transfer and recognition must meet the provisions in the legislation into force, appropriate to the degree characteristics, and it must be approved before its effective implementation.
 - Concerning credits recognition of professional experience, credits from university official degrees and/or other Higher Education programmes delivered by other providers, this recognition must be applied with regard to the degree teaching and learning outcomes.
- If applicable, the study plan must encompass an appropriate organisation of students mobility including credits recognition consistent with the degree teaching and learning outcomes.

4. Education planning

The study plan design, described in the modules, areas or subjects, responds to a consistent and coordinated design, which takes into account the students dedication throughout a determined period of time.

- Planning is consistent with the teaching and learning outcomes that will be achieved by students, with the learning modality and, if applicable, with specific curricular structures.
- Planning has a global internal consistency and coordination between the typology of modules, areas or subjects, their timeline organisation, training activities and face-to-face learning activities, teaching methodologies (if applicable, the methodological strategies for specific educational innovation), the evaluation systems and, the specific curricular structures.
- Credits assignment must be consistent with ECTS definition with regard to the students time distribution.
- The credits typology, timeline and assignment to modules, areas or subjects must be applied in accordance with current legislation into force, taking special consideration in relation to:
 - The total number of ECTS credits per academic year must be 60, which will be distributed in a balanced way throughout the academic year.
 - The degree must include a minimum of 60 ECTS on basic training, half of which will be in the degree academic filed, specified in areas or subjects with a workload of 6 ECTS and offered in the first half of the study plan. The rest of credits must be structured in areas and subjects to reinforce skills and knowledge. Bachelor degrees with a workload between 300 and 360 credits must include a minimum of 75 and 90 ECTS basic training respectively.
 - In case of degrees leading to regulated professions, the study plan proposal must meet the provisions in the corresponding ministerial orders.
 - If a Bachelor degree includes external curricular academic practices, these must represent at least 25 per cent within the total ECTS in the degree (with the exception of those degrees which according to European normative must include a different percentage or Bachelor degrees including dual mention), and they must be preferably offered in the second half of the study plan.
 - The study plan concludes with the preparation and public defense of a final Bachelor or Master thesis, with a minimum of 6 ECTS, which must be issued in the final stage of the study plan and it will be oriented to the assessment of the competencies related to the degree. The maximum ECTS workload in the final Bachelor thesis is 24 (with the exception of degrees with 300 or 360 ECTS, which might amount to 30 and 36 ECTS, respectively), whereas the final Master thesis will amount to a maximum of 30 ECTS.
- If applicable, the study plan must encompass differentiated planning with regard to learning modalities and it must ensure that the different learning modalities allow the achievement of the same learning and teaching outcomes.

- If applicable, the configuration and planning of mentions or specialities in the degree must be consistent with its characteristics.
- If applicable, the configuration and planning of specific curricular structures must be consistent with the degree characteristics and ensure the learning and teaching outcomes.

5. Academic staff and student support staff

Academic staff and student support staff must be appropriate to ensure the learning and teaching outcomes intended in the study plan.

- The available human resources (number, rank, research and teaching experience of academic staff and support staff training) must be sufficient and appropriate to develop the study plan proposed, ensuring sustainability (according to the number of vacancies, the different learning modalities offered, mentions and specialities, as well as the language in which the degree is lectured).

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

The material resources, infrastructures, practices and services required for the development of the activities included in the study plan must be appropriate to ensure achievement of the learning and teaching outcomes provided in the study plan.

- The available material resources and services, both owned and agreed ones (educational areas; academic facilities and equipment; labs; computer classrooms; scientific, technical, humanistic or art equipment; library and reading rooms; availability of new technologies-internet, virtual campus; etc.) must be sufficient and appropriate to develop the study plan proposed to ensure sustainability throughout time (according to the number of places and the different learning modalities offered).
- Students support and counselling services will be guaranteed, in order to facilitate incorporation into university of new students, and provide support throughout the learning and teaching process.
- If the degree includes external academic practices, the possibility to be performed by all the students must be guaranteed. The mechanism for organisation must be described, and (in accordance with Royal Decree 592/2014) the main Educational Cooperation Agreements must be provided, as well as the commitments to be signed by entities, institutions, organisations and enterprises which will welcome students, the educational projects developed in these practices and the implementation conditions.

7. Implementation timeline

The degree implementation process must be planned and contemplate a mechanism to integrate, if applicable, students coming from existing study plans.

- The new degree gradual or total implementation must respect the rights of students coming from former university ordinances.
- If the study plan is related to another programme that will be extinguished, the students adaptation procedure must be public and consistent with both study plans.
- Admission requirements and access conditions for the adaptation itineraries of graduate students coming from other study plans and their curricular design, must be consistent with the study plan and previous training.

8. Internal Quality Assurance System

The degree must be within the scope of an Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) that ensures its monitoring, review and continuous improvement.

- The IQAS proposed (in the degree, centre or at the university) must guarantee the appropriate study plan implementation.
- The IQAS allows to manage the information used to analyse the study plan development and relevant information is made public:
 - For students, both previously to their enrolment (on the degree characteristics, admission and access requirements, language of provision, etc.) and throughout the learning and teaching process.
 - For teaching staff, employers and general society.