# THE GOOD PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

In a context of the development of higher education in diversified and segmented scenarios, in which emerge new institutional shapes, a big multiplicity of university programs, new university enrolment configurations, new forms of teaching mediated by virtual technologies, and the need to respond to the requirements of the internationalization processes, it is necessary to think carefully about the mechanisms of quality assurance.
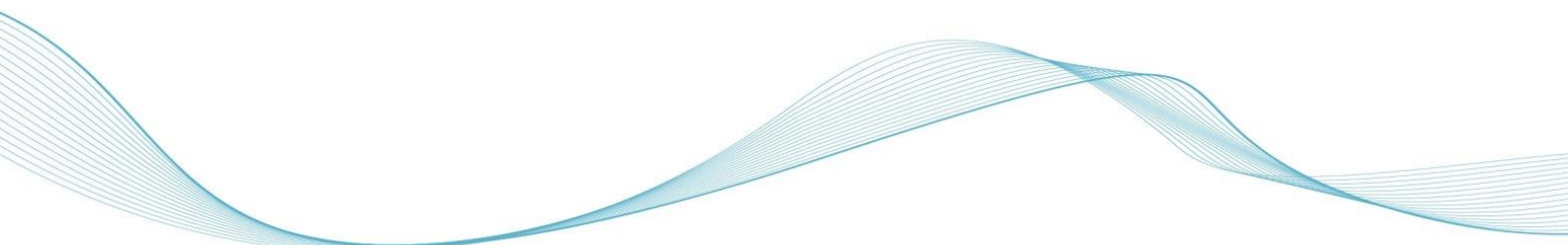
The strengthening of the internal QA mechanisms of HEIs and the external mechanisms constitutes the doorway to the mobility of students, graduates, and researchers at a national and international level. The quality of higher education must be ensured to facilitate mobility and the evaluation and accreditation have been constituted as effective mechanisms to guarantee and enhance HEIs and their programs.

The evaluation and accreditation agencies have adopted different features in Ibero-America, ranging from public organisms to private agencies, going through mixed systems that combine private agencies with State supervision. Their actions complement the internal evaluation mechanisms of HEIs and open the space of the external view that allows them to bring their analysis up for discussion. The external reviews constitute a strategic tool for the States, both as a regulation instrument and quality assurance, and as a source of substantive information for decision-making and policy planning.

The creation of evaluation and accreditation agencies and the maintenance of their activity over time has been one of the main objectives of the countries in terms of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. Once these bodies have been created, the subsequent step must focus on strengthening their task and advancing in the review of their practices to make them reliable not only before the higher education system of the country itself but also before the international view. The existence of documents that establish with accuracy the mission and goals, the definition of a governance structure, the development of evaluation and decision-making processes conducted with transparency, the participation of peer reviewers in the accreditation processes carried out based on clear standards and criteria of minimum quality, the construction of those standards and criteria not only with wide participation of the university system and the State, through their corresponding government bodies, but also with the participation of stakeholders, the publicity of all actions and outcomes, the evaluation of its proper functioning, just to name a few, are the necessary practices that must be settled among the quality assurance agencies.

The development of these mechanisms has reached a point where future progress must be based on building mutual trust, based on the recognition of good practices in the evaluation and accreditation processes, and the harmonization of higher education systems. Therefore, it is imperative to shape a regional system that could recognize liable quality assurance mechanisms to facilitate mutual recognition and mobility.

The following are some core principles of good practice for the mechanisms for quality assurance of higher education that, fulfilled by the entities that certify the quality of

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institutions and programs, would allow the development of a regional system for the recognition of short study periods and diplomas.

## THE GOOD PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS
## DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE
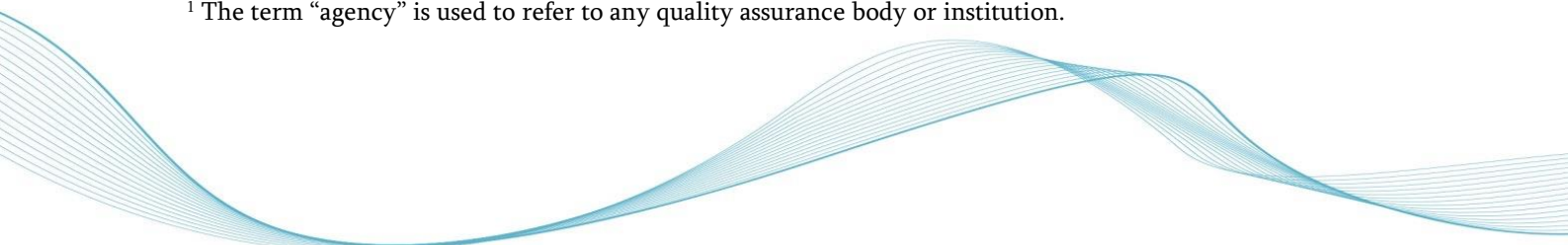## SALAMANCA – MAY 2019

The Ibero-American Quality Assurance System of Higher Education (SIACES, for its Spanish acronym) is committed to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations. In this context, the members of the System agree to contribute, within its scope of action, to the compliance of these objectives, promoting the constant innovation of the procedures, mechanisms, and tools utilized in the quality assurance frameworks.

Accordingly, the Members of the Ibero-American Quality Assurance System of Higher Education agreed to promote compliance with the following Principles of Good Practices:

1. THE AGENCY[1]

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| The agency and its actions are considered a strategic tool for the definition of public policy. |
| The agency is recognized on a legal basis, with explicit goals and objectives, and acts with independence and autonomy. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes, and it applies the policies with transparency, ethics, integrity, and professionalism. |
| The agency has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives which ensure its independence and impartiality. |
| The agency has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfill its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives and has training mechanisms for the staff for the effective and efficient conduction of the external evaluation following its mission and methodological approach. |
| The agency has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its activities, and periodically conducts a self-review of its activities, to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution toward the achievement of its objectives. |
| The agency collaborates with other QA agencies, takes part in international networks, and is open to international developments in quality assurance matters. |

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[1] The term "agency" is used to refer to any quality assurance body or institution.

2. THE ACTIONS OF THE AGENCY: ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) AND THE EVALUATION PROCESSES.

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| The agency respects the academic autonomy, identity, and integrity of the institutions and programmes, and recognizes that quality assurance is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves. |
| The agency is respectful of institutional diversity and translates it into criteria and procedures that consider the identity and goals of higher education institutions. Those standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the Agency's scope, and on the availability of necessary resources with consideration of internal follow-up mechanisms. |
| The agency carries out an external review process oriented to continuous improvement, reliable, and based on published criteria and procedures. Those procedures include a self-assessment, an external review, an opportunity for higher education institutions to correct errors, and consistent follow-up of the recommendations resulting from the external review. |
| The agency carries out the external review with the participation of teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. It has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers and has mechanisms to prevent conflict of interest. Likewise, the peer reviewers are supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials. |
| The agency provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation and has designed support instances for the HEIs that are submitting to evaluation. |
| The agency reports its policies and decisions about higher education institutions and programmes and disseminates reports about the overall outcomes. |
| The Agency has policies and procedures that ensure, at the end of every external review, a fair decision-making process and it has effective procedures for HEIs to appeal. |