



Proposals for future alignment of the quality assurance frameworks of the European Higher Education Area and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ALIGNMENT OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AND THE IBERO-AMERICAN KNOWLEDGE AREA

Authors

- José M. Nyssen (coord), ANECA
- María Sopeséns, ANECA
- Luis Miranda, ENQA Secretariat
- Sofía Farizano, SIACES Secretariat
- Filipa Ferreira, A3ES
- Marilena Maniaci, ANVUR
- Simone Via, ANVUR
- Emilia Primeri, ANVUR
- Paula Przybylowicz, AQUA
- Erika Castillo, CNA Chile
- Alvaro M. Flórez, CNA Colombia
- Gabriela Chidichimo, CONEAU
- Amélie Bensimon, Hcéres
- Marcia Noda, JAN
- Shannon Stowers, QAA



Project:

Alignment of SIACES-ENQA quality guidelines in higher education for bi-regional trust building
(ESG-PBP Alignment)

Editor: Organismo Autónomo Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación

Description: Free distribution / Monographic / Online / PDF.

Year: 2025

Language: English

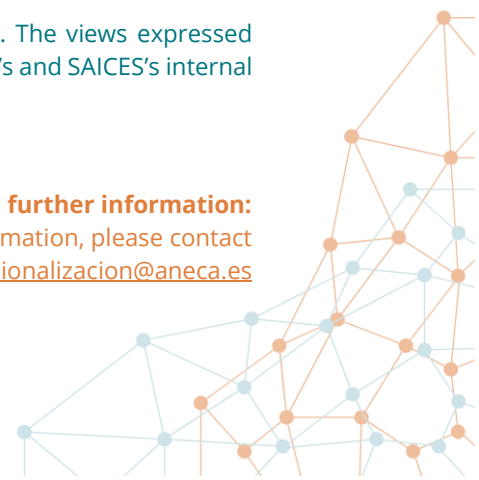


Report coordination: José M. Nyssen, Internationalization and Studies Unit. ANECA Directorate.

Editor's note: The opinions appearing in the different chapters of the report are the responsibility of their authors and are not necessarily shared by ANECA.

This report does not represent a formal policy position of ENQA and SIACES. The views expressed herein are intended to inform and stimulate discussion and will feed into ENQA's and SIACES's internal reflections on input to the revision of the ESG and the PBP.

Contact and further information:
For further information, please contact
the project coordinator by e-mail: internacionalizacion@aneca.es



CONTENTS

FOREWORD 3

INTRODUCTION 5

POTENTIAL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF THE ESG WITH THE PBP 8

POTENTIAL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF THE PBP WITH THE ESG
..... 14

CONCLUSIONS 21

REFERENCES 24



FOREWORD

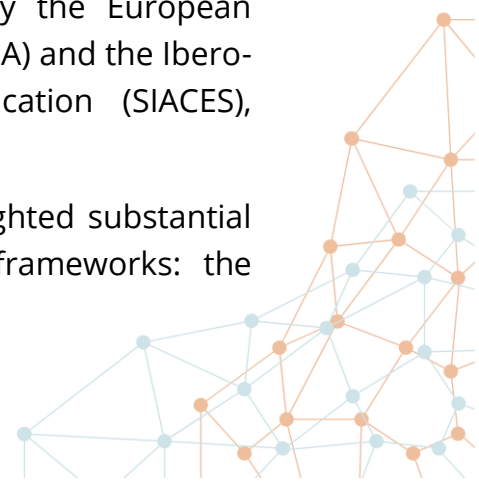
In 2024, two high-level meetings of strategic importance for the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area (EIC) took place. On the one hand, the EHEA Ministerial Conference held in Tirana (Albania); on the other, the III Meeting of Ministers of Higher Education convened within the framework of the XXIX Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, hosted in Valencia (Spain).

The ministerial communiqués issued from both events—despite addressing distinct regions—revealed a strong alignment in their overarching priorities. Both declarations emphasised the promotion of higher education systems committed to inclusion, equity, the Sustainable Development Goals, social responsibility, and the respect for fundamental rights and values. These shared principles were framed within a vision of international and inter-institutional cooperation, underscoring the commitment to ensuring that higher education makes a decisive contribution to addressing current challenges.

Both meetings reaffirmed the commitment to building regional higher education areas, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, in which higher education is considered as a public good. This shared vision encompasses objectives such as the civic and professional development of students, academic and talent mobility, international recognition of qualifications, and responsible digital transformation. In this context, both declarations underlined the strategic relevance of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of maintaining updated common reference frameworks, as currently exemplified by the EHEA and the EIC.

Against this backdrop of convergence and cooperation, the publication of the outcomes of the Alignment of SIACES-ENQA quality guidelines in higher education for biregional trust building project -ESG-PBP Alignment- acquires particular significance. This joint initiative, promoted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Ibero-American Quality Assurance System for Higher Education (SIACES), represents a milestone in bi-regional collaboration.

The [initial publication of results](#) from this initiative highlighted substantial similarities between the respective quality assurance frameworks: the



Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) and the Principles of Good Practice (PBP) of SIACES. Nevertheless, it identified key differences meriting further consideration.

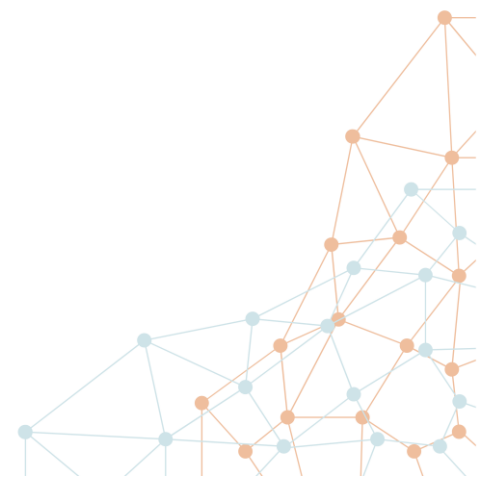
Acknowledging these differences —rooted in the diverse contexts in which the two systems operate— has served as a catalyst for joint reflection on potential enhancements to each framework and on opportunities for future alignment, with the aim of fostering mutual trust and understanding, based on shared values. Therefore, this second publication of the project advances towards that objective by presenting a set of proposals aimed at deepening dialogue and cooperation between the two regions.

Coordinated by ANECA, the project has benefited from the valuable contributions of experts from ten quality assurance agencies across both regions (A3ES, ANVUR, AQUA, CNA Chile, CNA Colombia, CONEAU, Hcéres, JAN, QAA and the coordinating agency), as well as from the ENQA and SIACES Secretariats. We extend our sincere acknowledgement to all individuals and organisations involved for their commitment and collaboration, which have been marked by mutual respect and constant cooperation.

In the Memorandum of Understanding signed by ENQA and SIACES in 2022, we expressed our conviction that initiatives fostering a shared understanding contribute not only to strengthening trust and good practices, but also to establish enduring links of friendship and cooperation. The fruitful dialogue generated through this project on the harmonisation of quality frameworks confirms that vision and paves the way for continued and consolidated collaboration in the future.

Douglas Blackstock
ENQA President

Mario F. Uribe Orozco
SIACES President



INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of the second phase of the **ESG-PBP Alignment** project.

This is the first joint ENQA-SIACES initiative resulting from the *Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*. This is the result of the shared will of the European and Ibero-American quality assurance communities to establish friendship and cooperation bonds; to build a common understanding, which contributes to mutual trust and the strengthening of their good practices in quality assurance of higher education; and to reinforce and widen collaboration and exchange of experiences in this field in their respective regions.

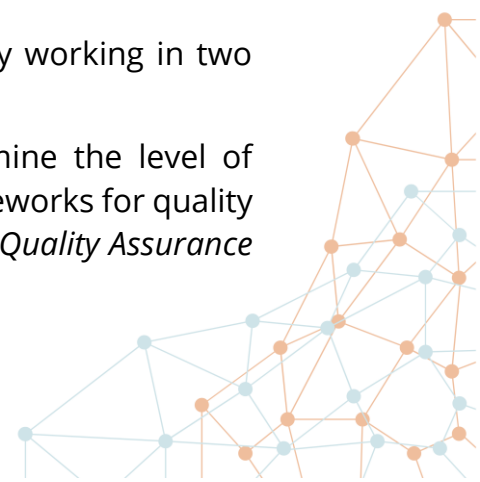
Based on this Memorandum, ENQA and SIACES seek to take steps towards the *knowledge between the parties about the approaches, methodologies and systems of quality assurance and improvement of higher education used and applied by each of them, as well as of the most relevant aspects related to the quality of higher education and the **harmonisation of criteria and guidelines, good practices and procedures adopted in both regions.***

This is an initiative coordinated by ANECA (Spain), and developed by a working group that includes the SIACES Secretariat, the ENQA Secretariat and around ten quality assurance agencies from both regions: A3ES (Portugal), ANVUR (Italy), AQUA (Andorra), CNA Chile (Chile), CNA (Colombia), CONEAU (Argentina), Hcéres (France), JAN (Cuba), QAA (United Kingdom), and the coordinating agency itself.

As it has already been stated in the first outcome document of the project, entitled *Comparison of the quality assurance reference frameworks of the European Higher Education Area and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area*, the **overall objective** of the project is to **strengthen mutual trust** regarding quality assurance and quality improvement in higher education **between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area (EIC)** by exploring alignment between the respective reference frameworks in this field.

In this way, the aim is to achieve this general objective by working in two consecutive phases.

In the first phase of the project, the aim was to determine the level of concordance and discordance between the reference frameworks for quality assurance in each region: the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*



in the EHEA (ESG)- and the *Principles of Good Practices (PBP)* of SIACES, in order to build solid foundations on which to take steps towards a mutual understanding of quality assurance.

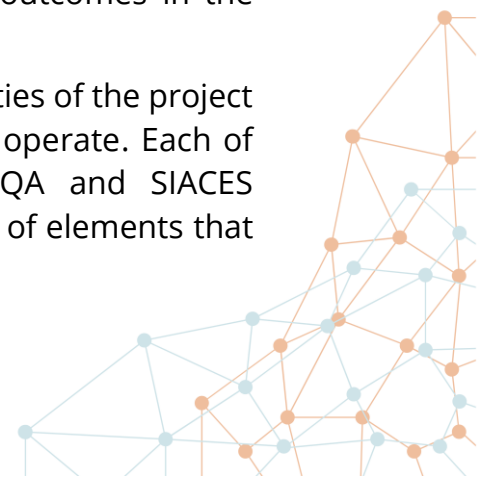
The results of the first phase of the project provided a diagnosis of the situation. This highlighted a range of common and differential elements classified in four main blocks:

- The first of these blocks addressed the comparison of the constituent elements of the two regional quality frameworks, focusing on: the overall objective of each framework; the scope; the strategic elements to be put in place for the achievement of regional quality assurance objectives; the authorship, institutional backing and prescriptive character of each framework; and, finally, their content structure.
- The second block compared elements related to the regional role of quality assurance, focusing on: the objectives of quality assurance; the main factors that guide quality assurance; intra-regional collaboration; and the responsibility of actors in quality assurance.
- Finally, the third and fourth blocks focused on the comparison of the approaches to quality assurance based by higher education institutions (HEIs) and quality assurance agencies. In this way, the third block focused particularly on the internal quality assurance of HEIs. The fourth block focused on the definition of goals and objectives of the agencies; the main guidelines for their actions; their characterisation; the development of external quality assurance processes for HEIs and educational programmes; and the development and implementation of internal and external reviews for quality assurance agencies.

When interpreting these results, it is also worth noting that the two frameworks have a markedly different structure and scope (for instance, the scope of the PBP does not explicitly cover internal quality assurance of HEIs). Hence, the work prioritised a thematic comparison of the analogous substantive elements contained in these frameworks. Thus, priority was given to comparing the elements at the ESG standard level with the elements at the PBP good practice principle level.

Based on the results of this first phase the second phase of the project has worked on a joint proposal for the alignment of the ESG and the PBP, in order to facilitate potential mutual recognition of external QA outcomes in the future.

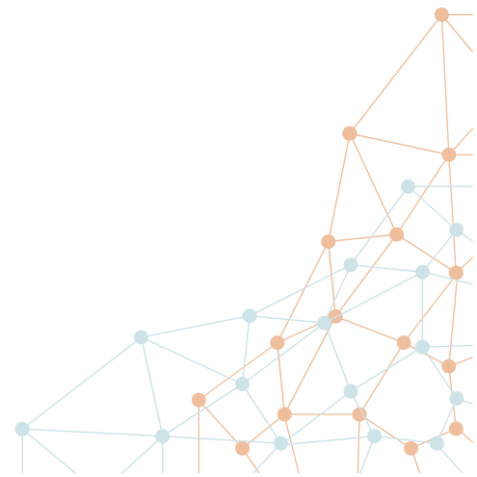
To this end, a sub-group was formed with the member entities of the project for each of the regional areas in which ENQA and SIACES operate. Each of these sub-groups, under the coordination of the ENQA and SIACES secretariats, respectively, has developed an initial proposal of elements that



could be incorporated into its own framework for future alignment with the other framework.

The proposals were then shared and reflected upon jointly by all the entities that make up the project's working group.

The result is set out in this document, which, in the same way as the one that precedes it, is expected to be shared with the responsible parties for the ESG and PBP review processes.



POTENTIAL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF THE ESG WITH THE PBP

ENQA working subgroup¹

This section contains general recommendations about aspects that could be included or further developed within the ESG to facilitate alignment with the PBP, based on the results of the comparative analysis published earlier this year (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, they also might be of interest to individual agencies in the EHEA that want to align with the PBP. Some of the recommendations include specifications about the level (principle, standard, guidelines) at which concrete aspects could be incorporated for an actual alignment between the two frameworks, even if some of them are already considered by the ESG at a different – and, usually, more general – one.

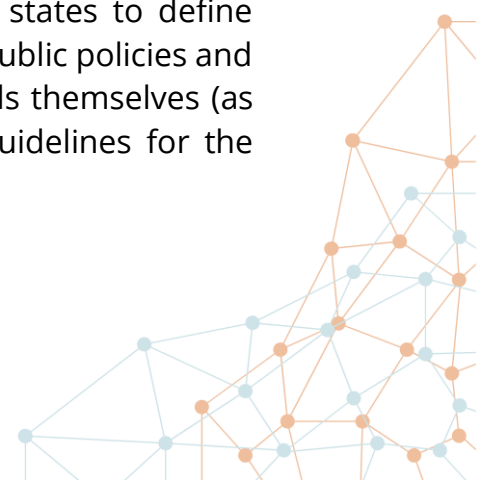
This study coincides with an ongoing revision of the ESG, as the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué (May 2024) included a mandate for its authors to revise the document: ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 Group), in cooperation with Business Europe, Education International and EQAR. The revision is coordinated by a Steering Committee, composed of one representative from each of the seven primary and cooperating authors, and the preparation of drafts is done by a smaller Drafting Group, composed of one expert nominated by each of the E4 organisations and answering directly to the Steering Committee. It is expected that the final text of the ESG should be approved by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) at its meeting in autumn 2026, with no further changes to be made before adoption by EHEA Ministers at the Ministerial Conference in Romania/Moldova in spring 2027.

1. CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE REGION

1.1. Strategic influence of quality assurance

As found by Nyssen *et al.* (2025), “although both documents [ESG and PBP] have the aspiration to contribute to society and its environment, the PBP encourage this aspiration to materialise in quality assurance being understood as a strategic planning tool for states to define public policies.” The element of broader impact on public policies and society as a whole is only taken up by the standards themselves (as opposed to in the introduction) when providing guidelines for the standard related to thematic analysis (ESG3.4).

¹ Chapter co-ordination by Luis Miranda, ENQA Secretariat.



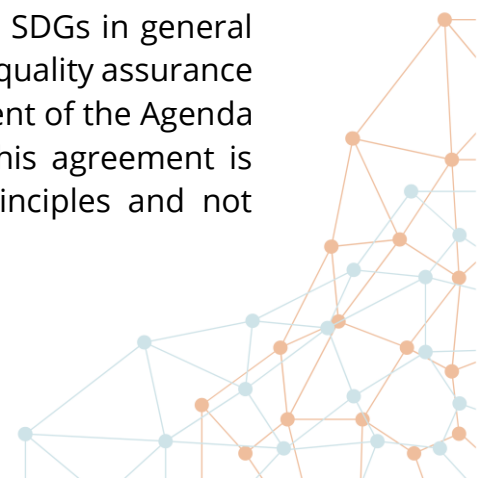
Therefore, the ESG could strengthen, as a principle, the importance of quality assurance as a strategic element with a wider impact on higher education policies beyond its field of application within stakeholder-driven higher education systems. This means understanding quality assurance procedures, results and analyses as a public good for the general benefit of society, while acknowledging the role of policy making at national or sub-national levels in the implementation of the framework and the Bologna Process key commitments. However, it must be noted that the ESG also apply to quality assurance agencies that are not rooted in any national/sub-national context. In this respect, the role of quality assurance agencies in fostering a quality culture could also be further acknowledged beyond section I (Context, scope, purposes and principles).

1.2. Role of quality assurance in setting the basis for the recognition of qualifications

In relation to the previous point, the ESG could further emphasise the role of quality assurance in fostering the recognition of qualifications among higher education systems. This is mentioned among the ESG purposes when referring to mutual trust, but an additional layer of prominence could be given to the impact on recognition, taking into account that “the PBP place specific emphasis on the development of a regional system for the recognition of qualifications” (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025).

1.3. Acknowledging and embracing principles for global sustainability

A key element of the PBP, as identified by Nyssen *et al.* (2025), is the importance of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). In this respect, the PBP include an explicit agreement from SIACES’ members towards fulfilment of the SDGs from within their scope of action, “promoting the constant innovation of the procedures, mechanisms, and tools utilised in the quality assurance frameworks.” The PBP imply a wider commitment of signatories to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in general within their own capacities; i.e., they expect that the quality assurance of higher education contributes to reach the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 goals. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this agreement is included in the introduction paragraph of the principles and not within the principles themselves.



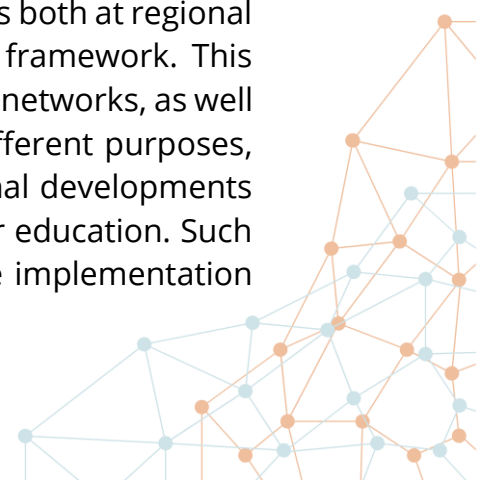
In this respect, the ESG could include standards on global sustainability, both for HEIs and quality assurance agencies. While it is true that the Agenda 2030 only comprises a limited period of fifteen years, and it must be noted that the upcoming update of the ESG is only expected to be approved by EHEA ministers in 2027, the concepts contained in the SDGs are expected to remain valid afterwards with respect to sustainability. Therefore, the ESG could consider the acknowledgement and operationalisation of environmental sustainability issues within the standards.

1.4. Collaboration between agencies

While “consensus and collaboration between agencies are key elements present both in the PBP and the ESG” and “cooperation within the region is at the heart of the initiative of each of these frameworks” (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025), PBP 1.6 explicitly expects that “the agency collaborates with other quality assurance agencies, takes part in international networks, and is open to international developments in quality assurance matters.” However, no reference is made in Part 3 of the ESG to collaboration through networks or other forms between agencies at regional (under the same framework, i.e. the EHEA) or international level, even if the ESG do emphasise on cooperation among stakeholder groups.

In this respect, it must be noted that the fact that ENQA is one of the authors of the ESG indirectly implies an important role of such cooperation in the development of the framework. De facto, all ESG-compliant agencies are either ENQA members or affiliates, although this is entirely voluntary, and many are part of other regional and international networks. Furthermore, the ESG explicitly refer to the role of exchange of information on quality assurance between countries and systems in their objectives and principles (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025), but do not specify this further in the standards beyond the capacity of the framework as a whole to facilitate the achievement of that purpose.

Therefore, in order to align both frameworks, the ESG might consider explicitly including the cooperation between agencies both at regional and international levels as an integral part of the framework. This includes participation in European and international networks, as well as bilateral cooperation with other agencies, for different purposes, including learning about and embracing international developments in matters related to the quality assurance of higher education. Such a cooperation is especially relevant considering the implementation



of other tools like the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* (2014), as well as the development of forms of cross-border quality assurance and quality assurance of transnational education, which require close dialogue between the agencies of the countries involved.

2. CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE BASED ON THE PROFILE AND ACTIONS OF AGENCIES

2.1. Governance structure of quality assurance agencies

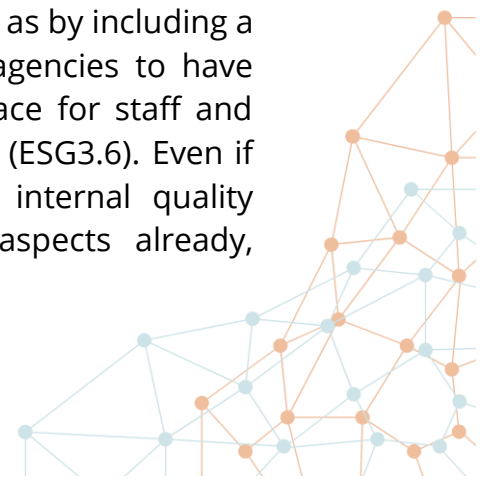
Considerations on governance of agencies are currently limited in the ESG to ensuring independence and stakeholder involvement, but, as stated by Nyssen *et al.* (2025), the PBP insist on the agencies' structure by making explicit reference to the need for agencies to have "a governance structure consistent with their mission and objectives." While the ESG do consider the importance of translating the mission statement's goals and objectives into the daily work of the agency, they do not consider this relationship at governance level.

Therefore, the ESG might consider reinforcing the importance of an adequate governance also in line with the agency's mission, goals and objectives. A wider description or examples of effective governance practices in quality assurance agencies might be also included at the level of guidelines.

2.2. Integrity and professionalism within quality assurance agencies

Although both frameworks recognise the need for agencies "to be guided by integrity in their actions and activities" (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025), the PBP place a greater emphasis on this aspect, while the ESG consider professional standards and integrity specifically in the context of internal quality assurance of agencies' activities.

In this respect, more emphasis on expert independence and professionalism could be added to the ESG by moving it from the guidelines (ESG2.4 and 3.3) to standard level, as well as by including a more explicit requirement for quality assurance agencies to have ethics, integrity and professionalism policies in place for staff and experts, instead of them focusing only on activities (ESG3.6). Even if the usual interpretation of ESG 3.6 is that the internal quality assurance system of an agency covers these aspects already,



highlighting this aspect at standard level in the ESG could facilitate a better alignment between the two frameworks.

2.3. Transparency and active dissemination of quality assurance procedures and results

Transparency is a core principle of the ESG. It is essential to understand standards 2.3, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 related to external quality assurance procedures. However, the PBP also consider this principle at the organisational level of the agencies. Therefore, in order to operationalise this principle also at this level, a possibility might be to add a requirement for transparency policies regarding the functions of the agency to the existing ESG requirement to have a publicly available mission statement that includes clear and explicit goals and objectives as stated in ESG3.1.

On another note, while the ESG require that external quality assurance criteria, reports and decisions are published, the PBP go a step beyond in encouraging an active dissemination of these aspects. Therefore, transparency could also be further operationalised in the ESG by including a requirement within the standards not only to publish but to also proactively disseminate information related to external quality assurance outcomes.

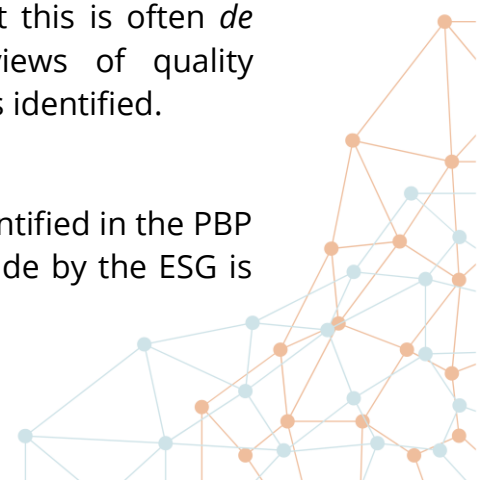
2.4. Resources

2.4.1. Infrastructure

While both the ESG and the PBP include considerations on agencies' resources, a key difference identified by Nyssen *et al.* (2025) is the fact that the ESG focus on human and financial resources while the PBP also consider physical resources. In this respect, infrastructure could be explicitly included in the ESG when tackling quality assurance agencies' resources. Physical resources could consider physical infrastructure in terms of office space, access to internet, etc., but also digital infrastructure regarding databases, provisions for remote work, etc., where applicable. Nevertheless, it must be noted that this is often *de facto* addressed in ESG-based external reviews of quality assurance agencies if a problem in that regard is identified.

2.4.2. Staff development opportunities

In terms of human resources, a key element identified in the PBP that could help enhance the considerations made by the ESG is



the need for quality assurance agencies to have staff development opportunities in place. Therefore, this observation calls for a more explicit reference to this in ESG 3.5.

2.4.3. Support for HEIs during the self-assessment process

Both the ESG and the PBP refer to an initial phase of self-assessment by HEIs or programmes during external quality assurance procedures. However, the PBP also note the importance of quality assurance agencies' support to HEIs in completing such an exercise, while the ESG do not make reference to this aspect. Therefore, the ESG guidelines might include a range of technical assistance and support mechanisms to enhance the quality of self-assessment reports and the consistency across them.

2.4.4. Additional assistance for external experts

While both frameworks recognise the importance of training external experts, the ESG might consider including additional considerations if it were to further align with the PBP. In this respect, the PBP mention "technical assistance" for peer reviewers to fulfil their activities. Both training and additional support could be incorporated into the ESG at the level of the standard that deals with peer-review experts (ESG2.4) in order to bring this aspect to the same level at which the PBP tackle it.

2.5. Enhancement approach to the internal and external quality assurance of agencies

Regarding the development of quality assurance processes for agencies themselves, both frameworks include provisions for internal and external quality processes to be implemented, but the PBP have an explicit orientation towards enhancement. The ESG might consider also reflecting the need for agencies to take into account continuous enhancement aspects to operate in a constantly changing environment and be future proof. This could be done by leveraging the impact of external reviews through long-term strategic improvement based on their results.



POTENTIAL AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF THE PBP WITH THE ESG

SIACES working subgroup²

This chapter proposes recommendations for the alignment and enrichment of the PBP with the ESG. This effort is part of the second phase of the project for elaborating a proposal for future alignment between the two frameworks. It takes as main inputs the report *Comparison of quality assurance reference frameworks of the European Higher Education Area and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area* (Nyssen *et al.*, 2025), as a result of the first phase of the same project, as well as the collaborative work between the SIACES agencies that make up the SIACES working group.

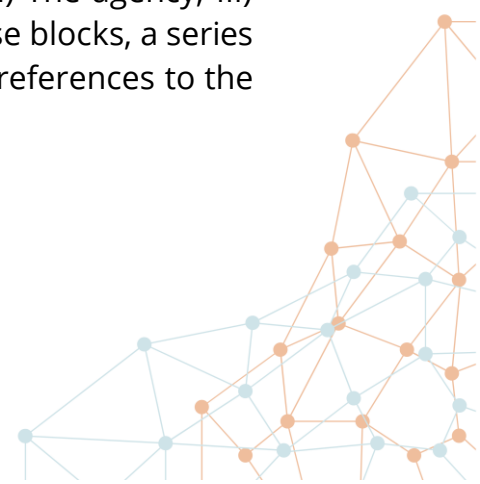
This exercise is based on the awareness that there are important convergences between the two frameworks in terms of their foundations, objectives and conceptions of quality. However, opportunities have been identified to strengthen the PBP by incorporating elements that are present in the ESG. These are considered useful to guarantee more solid, participatory, transparent and continuous improvement-oriented processes in the Ibero-American context.

The recommendations are presented from the perspective of the PBP, looking for aspects that could be included or further developed in the PBP to facilitate their potential harmonisation with the ESG; and, ultimately, a profitable dialogue between the Ibero-American Knowledge Area (EIC) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to address the current and future common challenges of higher education in a more effective way.

This process of alignment and enrichment is proposed to be continuous and participatory, involving all relevant EIC agencies and actors, in order to ensure that the PBP constitute a relevant instrument for the promotion of quality culture and the continuous improvement of higher education for the benefit of our societies.

The set of identified proposals is presented in three different blocks, correlating with the one present in the PBP document. These blocks are: I) General principles and objectives of the PBP framework; II) The agency; III) The work of quality assurance agencies. Within each of these blocks, a series of proposals for alignment have been identified, based on references to the comparative analysis of the first phase of the project.

² Chapter co-ordination by Sofia Farizano, SIACES Secretariat.



1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PBP FRAMEWORK

1.1. Scope and nature of the PBP

1.1.1. *Extending the call for commitment*

For the consolidation of good practices as a common quality assurance framework for the EIC, it is important that the different actors in the system commit to it. Not only SIACES member agencies and bodies, but also HEIs and other organisations representing stakeholders from the university system, such as students, and society should be invited to consider these principles as a reference document for the HEIs' and quality agencies' own improvement processes. It is also considered relevant that these principles take into account the expectations and needs of different stakeholders, as this is aligned with what is set out in section I of the ESG (Context, scope, purposes and principles).

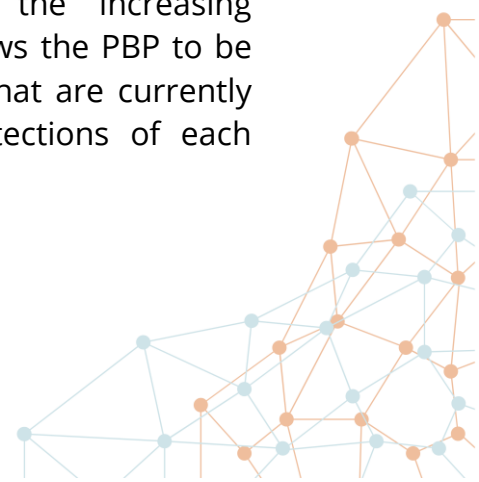
On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasise the existing commitment to the PBP by all the agencies that make up the system. In order to achieve this objective, regional strategies should be implemented to gradually advance in the validation of the good practices from the agencies that make up SIACES.

1.1.2. *Links between higher education and research and innovation*

Considering the links of learning and teaching to research and innovation, as reflected in the "Scope and concepts" section of the ESG, these would be another fundamental idea to highlight in the drafting of the PBP. These aspects should be taken into account in quality assurance processes, as appropriate to the nature and mission of the institutions and programmes.

1.1.3. *Broad definition of 'programme'*

In accordance with the introduction of the ESG, it is proposed to clarify that the term 'programme' is understood in the document as any form of higher education provision, including both degree and non-degree programmes, as well as various modes of learning and teaching, in recognition of the increasing diversification of education provision. This allows the PBP to be applicable to new forms of higher education that are currently under discussion, without lessening the protections of each regulatory framework.



1.1.4. Mutual trust building

The PBP seek to strengthen mutual trust between higher education systems in Ibero-America. This trust is based on the recognition of good practices in evaluation and accreditation processes, on the progressive harmonisation of criteria and procedures and on the commitment to common principles that ensure transparency through the exchange of information on quality assurance between the countries and systems involved. In comparing the PBP with the ESG, it is noted that countries, agencies and HEIs in the EHEA are committed to a set of common defined standards. And trust is established by the validation/verification of HEIs and agencies to act in accordance with those standards.

In the case of the PBP, trust is based on the recognition of practices validated by the pronouncement of principles. However, a more in-depth section on internal quality assurance systems needs to be developed in order to achieve alignment in this regard.

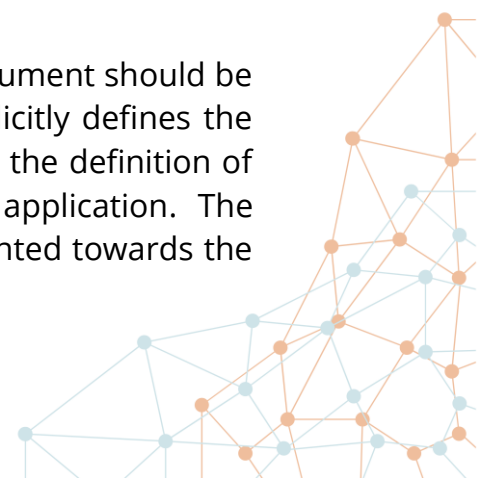
1.2. Stakeholder participation

Following standards 2.2. and 3.1. of the ESG, for the improvement of the PBP it is considered relevant for agencies to ensure that stakeholders are involved in their governance and work, as well as that stakeholders are involved in the design of external quality assurance methodologies and their continuous improvement. This includes students, HEIs, employers, graduates, institutional authorities and civil society representatives. In accordance with the ESG, it is considered that the involvement of the different actors, but especially students, in the design, as well as in the governing bodies or in the evaluation panels, guarantees the plurality of views and the generation of consensus.

1.3. Structure, adoption and character of the PBP

1.3.1. Strengthening the structure of the PBP

It is suggested that the structure of the PBP document should be enriched with an introductory section that explicitly defines the scope, the specific objectives of the framework, the definition of key concepts and the principles guiding its application. The inclusion of a block or section of principles oriented towards the



internal quality assurance of HEIs, in accordance with the ESG, would also be welcome.

1.3.2. Institutional support for the PBP

It is considered essential to make explicit the institutional support that the PBP have, with special emphasis on the support of the Ibero-American Summits of Heads of State and Government, as well as the meetings of Ministers and High Authorities of Higher Education in Ibero-America, which underlines its political and strategic relevance for the region.

1.3.3. Character of the PBP

Although the PBP were proposed as a guiding framework, it is considered that their essential core could be agreed to be taken into account and complied with by SIACES member agencies and, if the scope were extended to cover internal QA, as a recommendation, by EIC HEIs. This progress could be achieved through the implementation of accompanying strategies and an appropriate transition period.

2. THE AGENCY

2.1. Ethics, integrity and transparency

2.1.1. Active transparency and access to information

It is proposed to expand on transparency policies and access to information. It is appropriate to specify that, in accordance with the standard 3.1 of the ESG, agencies should ensure clear and accessible publication of their goals, objectives and the results of their evaluation processes. The PBP should include the criteria used, the full assessment reports, the decisions taken and the tracking actions. This information should be made accessible to all stakeholders through various dissemination channels, including their up-to-date websites.

2.2. Agencies' resources

In relation to the agencies' resources, it is considered appropriate in both frameworks to specify the type of resources that agencies need to operate. When the PBP refer to physical resources, they include in their content those related to technological resources.



It is also proposed to add that agencies should also have adequate and sufficient financial resources to fulfil their mission and carry out their functions effectively, efficiently and independently, in accordance with the standard 3.5 of the ESG.

3. THE WORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

3.1.External evaluation processes of HEIs and programmes

3.1.1. Internal and external quality assurance

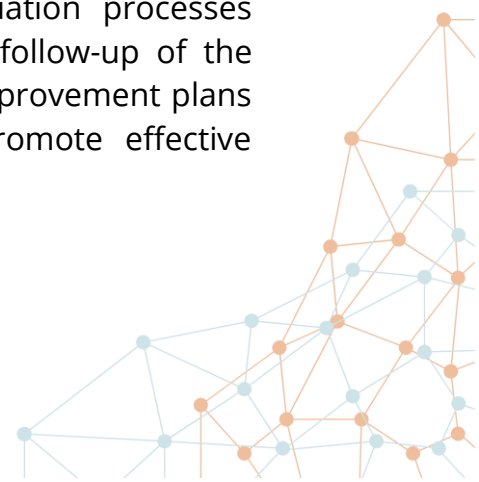
It is proposed to establish an explicit link between internal and external quality assurance, in alignment with the standard 2.1 of the ESG. In line with this, it is recommended that the PBP document specifies the articulation and complementarity between the internal quality assurance processes of HEIs and the external quality assurance processes carried out by the agencies. External evaluation methodologies should consider and review the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance systems, keeping in mind that institutions are primarily responsible for quality.

3.1.2. Relevant quality assurance systems regulations

In accordance with the guidelines for the standard 2.2 of the ESG, it is recommended to incorporate into the PBP an explicit statement which specifies that the external evaluation methodologies and criteria used by the agencies should take account of the current national and institutional regulations applicable to the HEIs and programmes evaluated, without prejudice to the quality standards promoted by the PBP. The incorporation of this point would reinforce the concept of relevance of the evaluation.

3.1.3. Assessment follow-up

It is recommended, in accordance with the standard 2.3. of the ESG, to specify into the PBP the need for follow up the assessments by the agency. Therefore evaluation processes should include mechanisms for a systematic follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations or improvement plans derived from the evaluation, in order to promote effective continuous improvement in HEIs.



3.1.4. Appeals and complaints

In accordance with the standard 2.7 of the ESG, it is recommended that the PBP provide guidance to the agencies on the importance of conceptually and procedurally differentiating between 'appeals' (defined as formal objections to the results) and 'complaints' (complaints about the evaluation process itself), as well as of establishing clear mechanisms for handling them. It is also proposed to include in the PBP document the need for agencies to communicate clearly and accessibly to HEIs about these processes. In this way, the right to reply and the consideration of these requests are guaranteed.

3.1.5. Evaluation results

It is suggested to broaden the perspective on the results that can be derived from an agency-driven evaluation process. In this regard, the results of external quality assurance processes may take various forms, such as reports with recommendations, judgements or formal decisions on compliance with standards, including accreditation decisions where appropriate.

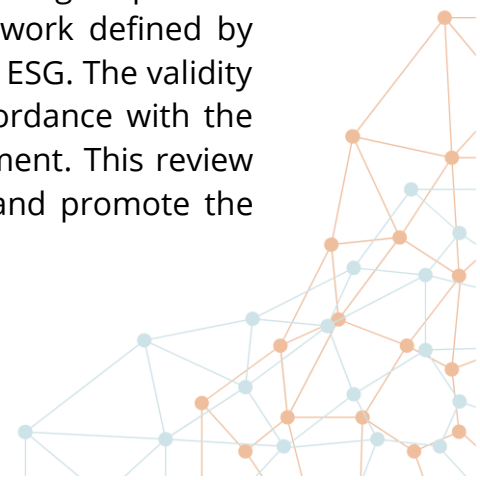
3.2. Agencies' own quality assurance

3.2.1. Internal quality assurance of agencies

To ensure the quality and integrity of the agencies' activities, it is essential that the periodic self-assessment processes outlined in the PBP are extended and aligned in accordance with the standard 3.6. of the ESG. This involves establishing internal quality assurance mechanisms that allow an objective and continuous review of procedures, empowering continuous improvement and transparency. The implementation of these processes strengthens the credibility of agencies, ensuring that their actions comply with principles of excellence and institutional accountability.

3.2.2. Periodic external review of agencies

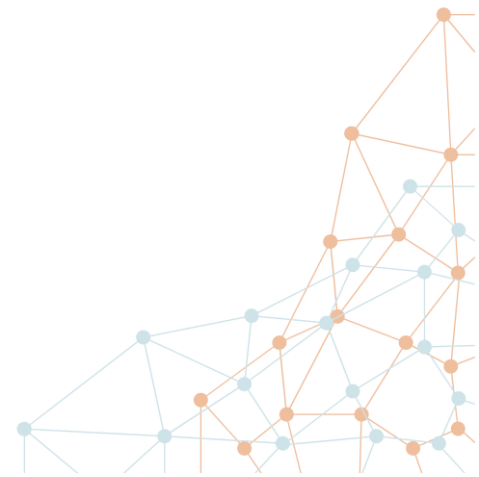
It is proposed that SIACES member agencies undergo a periodic external review against the shared PBP framework defined by SIACES, as it is set out in the standard 3.7 of the ESG. The validity period of the review would be 6 years, in accordance with the SIACES good practices validation process document. This review aims to verify compliance with the principles and promote the



continuous improvement of the agency, thus strengthening confidence in the Ibero-American quality assurance system.

3.3.Preparation of reports and analyses

It is considered relevant that agencies generate information to support discussions and conversations that can be used, among other things, for public policy. Analytical information should serve the system as a whole and will also address HEIs and other relevant stakeholders. For example, the ESG refer to thematic reports or analytical studies that can help to reflect on and improve quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.



CONCLUSIONS

This second phase of the ESG-PBP Alignment project presents several proposals for the potential future alignment of the ESG and PBP, based on the conclusions from the comparison between both frameworks.

In this case, the document has not focused so much on the noticeable and important concordances that exist between the two reference documents in their fundamental elements, which were already reflected in the previous publication of this project. However, based on the analysis of the differences identified in it, an exercise of reflection has been carried out, which has allowed an exchange of perspectives between the agencies that work with and implement these quality assurance frameworks, with a view to the reciprocal enrichment of both frameworks, an increase in mutual trust and the strengthening of bi-regional relations and cooperation in order to face common challenges.

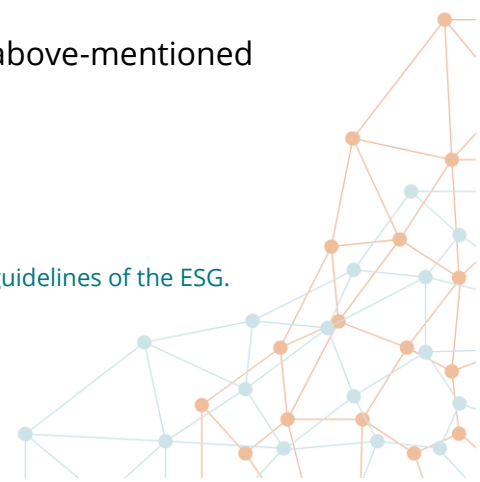
Thus, in the case of the ESG, a reflection is proposed on the more tangible incorporation of elements present in the PBP. With respect to the role of quality assurance in the region, the following suggestions are made:

- reinforcement of the importance of quality assurance as a strategic element in public higher education policies;
- relationship of quality assurance to the international recognition of qualifications;
- sustainability-oriented content, in accordance with the international sustainable development Agenda;
- and inter-agency cooperation at international level, including participation in networks of evaluation bodies and openness to adopting developments from the international level.

Regarding the profile and actions of the agencies, the aforementioned reflection focuses on the need to incorporate on the standards level³:

- strengthening of institutional governance in accordance with the agency's mission, goals and objectives;
- development of ethics, independence, integrity and professionalism policies for the experts who act as peer reviewers and, where appropriate, for the agency staff;
- mention of career development opportunities for the above-mentioned staff;
- reference to the physical resources of the agencies;

³ Even acknowledging that many of these aspects are currently covered in the guidelines of the ESG.



- strengthening of the agency's transparency on the organisational level and the active dissemination of the quality assurance processes and results derived from its work;
- support mechanisms from the agencies to the HEIs during the self-assessment process, as well as technical assistance mechanisms to facilitate the work of peer reviewers;
- and the agencies' more explicit focus on continuous enhancement in the self-review and external review processes of the quality assurance agencies.

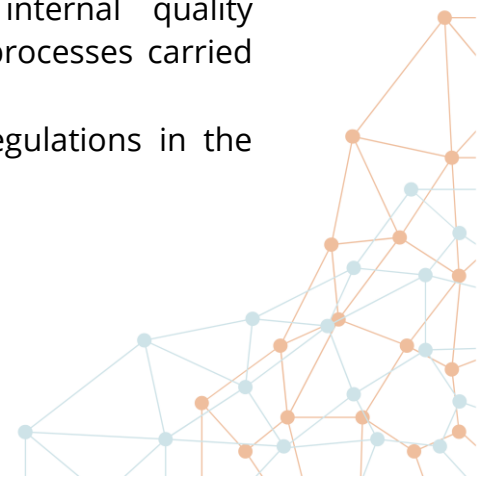
From a complementary point of view, in the case of the PBP, a reflection on the incorporation of elements present in the ESG is proposed. With respect to their general principles and objectives, the following proposals are made:

- inclusion of the explicit support of EIC governments in the PBP document itself, and the adherence to these Principles by quality agencies, HEIs and other organisations representing relevant stakeholders in the higher education system;
- given the above-mentioned, and in order to strengthen mutual trust, commitment to a common set of standards to be met by agencies and HEIs;
- involvement of different actors, especially students, in institutional governing bodies, in peer-review panels and in the design of external quality assurance methodologies and their continuous enhancement;
- and, from a quality assurance point of view, orientation towards linking the teaching and training mission of HEIs with the research and innovation mission.

Taking into account the actions of HEIs, given that the scope of the PBP does not explicitly cover their internal quality assurance, it is also proposed to consider incorporating into the PBP the development of principles that address in greater depth HEIs' internal quality assurance systems.

Finally, regarding the characterisation and actions of quality agencies, it is worth reflecting on including in the PBP the following elements:

- clear and accessible publication of the goals, objectives and results of the agencies' assessment processes;
- reference to the financial resources of quality assurance agencies;
- articulation and complementarity between HEIs' internal quality assurance processes and external quality assurance processes carried out by assessment agencies;
- consideration of existing national and institutional regulations in the evaluation process;



- inclusion of mechanisms in the external assessment processes that allow a systematic follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations or improvement plans derived from these processes;
- broadening of the perspective on the forms that the results of a process carried out by an agency can take;
- differentiation between 'appeals' and 'complaints', as well as clearer communication to HEIs about the processes linked to both;
- generation of system-wide analytical information that can be used, among other things, for public policy;
- establishment of internal quality assurance mechanisms within quality assurance agencies that allow for an objective and continuous review of procedures to promote constant enhancement and transparency;
- and, linked to the above, regular external review of quality assurance agencies in terms of the PBP's shared framework.

As a final conclusion, this initiative is not limited to the objective of building mutual trust with the goal of facilitating mobility and the recognition of qualifications. It is an expression of the bi-regional desire for collaboration and partnership based on shared values and objectives already anticipated by the First Summit of Heads of State and Government of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union held in Rio de Janeiro in 1999. In this sense, it goes beyond the similarities and differences identified in the comparison between the PBP and the ESG, and the alignment proposals to bring both frameworks closer.

This initiative, which is based on a sincere respect between both regional areas, is not limited to seek, through dialogue, an opportunity for a continuous exchange of perspectives between these two reference frameworks for quality assurance and for their mutual enrichment.

This initiative also aspires to turn this 'dialogue' into a 'conversation', in a broad and ancient sense of the term, that takes place in a familiar, companionable and friendly way of speaking with others. From a point of view of common values, such a conversation encourages the substantive, relevant, harmonious and sustained orientation of the instruments for improving and assuring quality so that they contribute to enabling HEIs, on the basis of their autonomy, to respond to the shared challenges of our societies.



REFERENCES

- Declaration of the 1st EU-LAC Summit of 29 June 1999, Rio de Janeiro: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/266740/1999_ES_rio_decl.pdf.
- European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf.
- Nyssen, J.M. (coord.), Sopeséns, M., Miranda, L., Farizano, S., Ferreira, F., Maniaci, M., Via, S., Primeri, E., Przybylowicz, P., Castillo, E., Flórez, A. M., Chidichimo, G., Bensimon, A. Noda, M., Ramos, E. (2025). Comparison of the quality assurance reference frameworks of the European Higher Education Area and the Iberoamerican Knowledge Area: https://www.aneca.es/documents/20123/215930/Doc_PAPER_EN_20250220.pdf/fac9859f-c647-2cc4-452f-156bdac6f792?t=1743668246047.
- SIACES (2019). Las buenas prácticas en los sistemas de aseguramiento de la calidad. Declaración de Principios de Buenas Prácticas: <http://www.siaces.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DeclaracionPrincipiosBuenasPracticas.pdf>.
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015). Brussels, Belgium: https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf.
- Tirana communiqué, 29-30 May 2024, Tirana: <https://ehea.info/Immagini/Tirana-Communique1.pdf>.
- United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf?_gl=1*10acd0*_ga*MTc2NTc1MjUwMy4xNjgyNDI1ODgw*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*czE3NTg2NDEwMzgkbzl4JGcwJHQxNzU4NjQxMDM4JGo2MCRsMCRoMA.



A large, light blue, stylized graphic element resembling a thick, continuous line that forms a large, abstract shape, possibly a stylized letter 'L' or a series of connected loops, set against a solid teal background.

LANECA