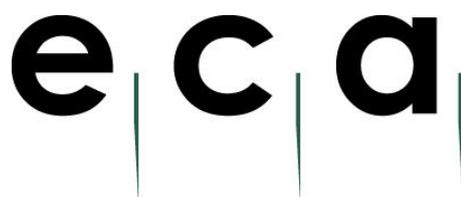


CNA - Consejo Nacional de Acreditación (Colombia)

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european consortium for accreditation

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1. Introduction

The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) has been founded in 2003 with the aim of mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions. A first step towards reaching this goal was the signing of twelve bilateral mutual recognition agreements between ECA members. These agreements are most useful for joint programmes, but twelve bilateral agreements, restricted to a limited number of ECA member countries, only fully covers a limited number of joint programmes. A multilateral mutual recognition agreement (MULTRA) with a focus on joint programmes was conceived to improve this situation. As a result, joint programmes can be assessed in a single procedure rather than through multiple national accreditation procedures.

The MULTRA stands for a high level of trust between accreditation agencies. This trust is based on evidence gained through intense cooperation and observations of procedures amongst the MULTRA agencies. The observation is not meant to repeat the external evaluation of an agency but aims to gain mutual trust through observing accreditation practice. The observation should provide evidence if the accreditation procedures and standards are free of significant differences from those of MULTRA agencies and if the results of accreditation procedures of joint programmes can thus be accepted by MULTRA agencies.

For agencies seeking to sign MULTRA, two MULTRA members will write an observation report and give a recommendation to all MULTRA members.

2. General information

<i>Accreditation organisation observed:</i>	Consejo Nacional de Acreditación (CNA)
<i>Country</i>	Colombia
<i>Accreditation procedure regarding:</i>	Master Program in Hydraulic Engineering Universidad Nacional de Colombia
<i>Date(s) of the observation:</i>	1-4 October 2012
<i>Name/organisation of the observers</i>	Carme Edo Ros (AQU) Guido Langouche (NVAO)

3. Observations

The following observations are based on the self evaluation report and the external evaluation report of the agency and the evidence gained through the observation visit.

The observation report should provide evidence if the accreditation procedures and standards are free of significant differences from those of MULTRA agencies.

The observation report should also provide evidence if the results of accreditation procedures of joint programmes can be accepted by MULTRA agencies.

3.1 Framework of the procedure

In which framework did the procedure take place? This section should address the elements listed below in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the accreditation practice of the observed agency.

1. *Structure of accreditation framework (including relevant documents, e.g. legislation, ...)*
2. *Accreditation standards*
3. *Additional requirements for the assessment of joint programmes*
4. *Focus of the accreditation procedure (e.g. input factors, internal quality assurance, ...)*
5. *Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*
6. *Enhancement strategies for institutions*
7. *Responsibility for accreditation procedures*
8. *Steps in the accreditation procedure*
9. *Assessment rules and decision scale when accreditation is granted (e.g. excellent, insufficient; conditions, ...)*
10. *Decision-making process of the agency (rules and responsibility)*
11. *Period of accreditation*
12. *Appeal system*
13. *Publication policy*
14. *Average number of procedures per year*

Accreditation framework

Only half a year prior to this observation visit, CNA has been positively evaluated by INQAAHE (the *International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*) for its alignment with the INQAAHE *Guidelines for Good Practice* (GGP). The INQAAHE GGP are very close to the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG). The accreditation framework of CNA has been thoroughly analysed by INQAAHE and the evaluation report is available on the INQAAHE website [<http://www.inqaahe.org/main/professional-development/review/inqaahe-review-reports>]

We refer to this very recent report for a more detailed description and evaluation of the structure of the accreditation framework of CNA and its underlying legislation, and will restrict ourselves in this observation report to its major characteristics focusing on those that are different from the more traditional accreditation agencies.

Colombia has a rather unique binary system of quality control in higher education organized by its Ministry of Higher Education. Besides the CNA accreditation system, which is voluntary and free of charge for public as well as private institutions of higher education, Colombia has a system of basic quality control of its higher education, both public and private, through a compulsory registration (*Registro Calificado*) in order to be allowed to operate legally in Colombia. This registration is attributed by an Agency called CONACES, National crossed - field Commission on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, after an evaluation of the institutions and

the contents of their study programmes and must be renewed every 7 years. The evaluation whether minimum quality standards are fulfilled is done by a team of experts, through a site visit, on the basis of quality criteria from which the academic level, the viability, the presence of sufficient human and physical resources, and the social and professional impact of the programme are estimated.

Complementary to the *Registro Calificado* of CONACES which guarantees minimum quality standards, an accreditation by CNA is meant to reflect high quality standards. A CNA accreditation indeed is propagated by CNA as a label of excellence that only the best institutions can obtain. This high quality picture of CNA -accredited institutions is also upheld in the Colombian press, as the team of observers could read in an extensive press report on higher education during their observation mission (*EL Tiempo*, 29 September 2012).

Decision Scale

Although the CNA is not using a formal ranking of institutions, there is an implicit ranking in the accreditation term attributed upon accreditation. The maximum term is 10 years, and is only attributed to institutions which are “examples” for the nation. The minimum accreditation term is 4 years, which means that some aspects have to be corrected during this term. Terms of 6 and 8 years reflect increasing quality levels found in the evaluation.

Also unique in the Colombian quality assurance system is a system of state examinations (like the one called *Saber Pro*) organized by the Ministry of Education at the end of the bachelor level. Students have to participate in these exams in order to obtain their degree. The contents of these tests are under evolution and presently mainly focusing on transferable skills. A number of field-specific tests should be added soon.

The results of these state examinations are made public and some kind of institutional ranking can be derived from the average record of the students from each institution. CNA pointed out to the observation team that CNA-accredited institutions clearly rank highest in the country when judged by the results of the state examinations.

Programme and institutional accreditation

CNA accredits as well programmes as institutions. At the time of the observation visit, and according to data delivered by CNA, Colombia has 286 Institutions of higher education, of which

80 are universities. Less than half of the Higher Education Institutions in Columbia have at least one of their study programmes accredited by CNA and two thirds of these are universities. Hence, in terms of programme accreditation, and even more in institutional accreditation, non-university higher education institutions are clearly underrepresented with respect to universities. Once the majority of their programmes eligible for accreditation are indeed accredited, higher education institutions may apply to CNA for an institutional accreditation. Once an institutional accreditation has been obtained, the accreditation process for programmes that are applying for re-accreditation is much lighter because institutional factors are not re-evaluated again to the same level during the external evaluation.

Although the Colombian government would like more institutions to qualify for CNA-accreditation, and although the accreditation process is totally free of charge, CNA institutional accreditation has almost exclusively been attributed to universities: between 2001 and 2011 only 23 institutions of higher education (out of 286) have obtained an institutional accreditation (thus less than 10 % of all higher education institutions) of which 21 were universities (out of 80).

Accreditation standards

In terms of accreditation standards, the evaluation of a master-programme, such as the one that was subject to this observation process, happens according to guidelines spelled out in a 33-page document that the observers received, entitled *“Guidelines for the High-Quality Accreditation of master (and doctoral) programmes - publ. May 2010”*. The evaluation “standards” in this text are grouped in 10 factors, 29 characteristics and 95 indicators.

In another document entitled *“Self-evaluation aiming at a high quality accreditation for master and doctoral programs – Procedure manual – publ. May 20120”* the same 10 factors and 29 characteristics are proposed with a somewhat larger number of (126) indicators. The Self-Evaluation-Report (SER) of the observed study-programme in this site visit, which the observers received, is a 135-page document which discusses, after a 20-page introduction, 130 indicators one by one in detail.

The indicators are nevertheless not a rigorous framework for the evaluation of the programme (hence probably the variation in the number of indicators in the respective documents) and programmes have – to a certain extent – freedom to select from the extensive list of indicators those that are best suited for the goals of the programme that they wish to be accredited.

The ten factors are:

1. Relation between the programme and the global institutional educational project
2. Students
3. Professors
4. Academic processes
5. Research
6. Connection to the ambient
7. Internationalization
8. Institutional support
9. Former students
10. Physical and financial means

So, in terms of accreditation standards, we are dealing with a system focusing on a description of facts, grouped under 10 broad topics (“factors”). There is little room for a discussion of policies in the SER (like: what is the purpose of the programme ?; what are the expected learning outcomes ?; how is this reflected in the contents of the study programme ?), except for the introduction which contains short paragraphs on vision, mission, objectives and eight lines on the expected profile of the outgoing student. After the written analysis of all 130 indicators, which accounts for the bulk of the SER, about ten pages of the SER are devoted to an auto-evaluation of the programme, again according to the 10 factors. The last 3.5 pages are devoted to the plans for improvement in the future.

Subjects like the internal quality assurance system are discussed under the Factors “students” and “professors”.

Although the observers had sometimes some difficulty in finding the relevant “standards” among the “characteristics” and the “indicators”, the observers were satisfied with the way factors/characteristics/indicators were used for the evaluation of the programme. The observers found that the essential standards receive sufficient attention during the accreditation process, with one exception. When looking at the accreditation standards, there is no direct request to formulate the intended learning outcomes of the programme, nor for an evaluation of the acquired learning outcomes. We will discuss this issue explicitly in paragraph 3.2.3 which is devoted to learning outcomes.

Evaluation panels

The Colombian CNA has a high-quality procedure to select peers for the evaluation panels. The INQAAHE-panel noted in their evaluation report that, concerning peer selection, CNA fully complies with and even surpasses the requirements of the relevant standard. CNA maintains a data bank of over 3.000 names of peers. These were initially invited to apply and selected after a review by CNA on the basis of academic quality criteria. CNA organizes (regional) training sessions for the development of the evaluation skills of the peers.

When an accreditation mission is due, the academic secretariat of CNA prepares a list of names of experts from the data bank that could act as potential experts in that panel. The selection is made by the Council (Consejo) of seven councillors.

The observers were somewhat surprised by the fact that only two peers performed the visitation of the study programme. Although the INQAAHE evaluation report mentions that “for the evaluation of postgraduate programmes the evaluating team normally includes one or more international peers” this turned out not to be the case. The observers learned during their discussions with CNA that international peers are only participating in institutional accreditations. Although the two peers that were active in the actual evaluation which the observers witnessed were very professional, the observers would like to recommend to CNA to add a third peer to their panels for master programmes, the third one being international. By “international peer” the observers mean an expert in the field who had a recent multiannual teaching experience in a higher education institution in another country, and thus not necessarily a foreign national.

The observers also want to mention that there were no students in the evaluation panels, nor on the decision making bodies. CNA representatives discussed with the observers the reasons for not including student representatives in the panel. Observers had the chance of meeting with a group of students during the site visit; some of these students could have a good profile for joining the evaluation panel.

CNA apparently does not have a procedure to let the same evaluators judge the same study programme at different universities. The observers would have expected this, especially since the Colombian evaluation system involves some kind of ranking in the accreditation term attributed. In the eyes of the observers the consistency in this part of the decision-making would profit from having the same observers comparing different similar programmes.

Decision making process

The final accreditation conclusions, after analysing and discussing the reports of the peers, are taken by the Council. The seven *Consejeros* on the Council are all respected university academics appointed by the ministry of education, after a public call for applications and selection by CESU (the *National Council for Higher Education*). This composition of the Council is maybe somewhat surprising since more than two thirds of the higher education institutions are not universities, but the *Consejeros* do not – of course – represent their sector but are there on the basis of their academic reputation, their experience and credibility in the higher education sector.

This Council meets once a month for a 3-4 day session but is also very active between sessions. Apart from the selection of the peers for the evaluation panels, the main task of the Council is to take decisions on the accreditation of programmes and institutions on the basis of the reports from the peers.

The final accreditation decision is taken by the Ministry of Higher Education. Up to now, the Ministry always followed the conclusion of the Council. The INQAAHE evaluation report discusses the independence of the Accreditation Agency with respect to the Ministry and came to the conclusion that CNA meets substantially, but not fully the first GGP-guideline, since there is the independence is fully functional at this moment, but structurally not fully guaranteed. The observers see no need to repeat this discussion which can be found in this observation report.

Publication policy.

Accreditation decisions are published after the official Ministerial Resolution which concludes the accreditation procedure. The observers checked a few of these publications on the CNA website and were somewhat surprised to encounter only a publication of the “Strengths” (*Fortalezas*) of the accredited programme. The actual accreditation decision contains also a number of “recommendations” which are apparently not made public. Negative decisions are also not published.

As the INQAAHE standard for reporting public information stipulates that “*the content and extent of reporting may vary with the cultural context and applicable legal and other*

requirements” there is no conflict with this standard. Also the ESG are somewhat vague concerning what exactly has to be published.

3.2 Site visit

3.2.1. The expert panel

This section of the observation report is based on the ECA Principles for the Selection of Experts. Here the observations concerning the selection of the expert panel are presented.

Number of panel members: 2
Gender balance exclusively male

EXPERTISE INCLUDED IN THE PANEL OF THE OBSERVED PROCEDURE

EXPERTISE	INCLUDED
• experience in quality assurance in higher education	No
• appropriate academic qualifications and scientific or professional reputation in the relevant area(s)	Yes/No*
• relevant international experience that provides a basis for making international comparisons	Yes/No*
• knowledge on teaching and learning methods	Yes
• expertise in development, design, provision and evaluation of higher education programmes	No
• knowledge of the country-specific system of higher education, institutions and applicable legislation	Yes
• student representatives in the respective area(s)	No
• representatives from the labour market	No
• a significant proportion of panel members from outside the country	No

* expertise is present but could be more focussed

The panel consisted on two peers, one of them acting as site visit coordinator. Upon request the observers received the CV’s of the two peers from CNA.

The site visit coordinator is Colombian and made his undergraduate studies at the Universidad Industrial de Santander, Colombia. He has obtained in 2006 a master degree in Mechatronical

Engineering from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in the beginning of 2012 his doctoral degree in Mechanical Engineering at the Universidade do Sao Paulo, Brazil. He has published two chapters in English in books, which were published in Austria, respectively Japan, and which probably conference contributions. He has also published 17 publications (of which one in English) in Colombian scientific journals and one publication in Portuguese in a Brazilian scientific journal.

In terms of citations, we could only find one citation to one article: his English-language article published in 2008 in the “Revista Colombiana de Computación”.

As field of research his CV mentions Robotics.

Since 2008 he is teaching at the Universidad Industrial de Santander one course in Mechatronics at the graduate level and two more general courses as the bachelor level.

The second member of the panel finished his undergraduate studies at the AGH University of Science and Technology, Krakow, Poland in 1994 and obtained his Master of Science degree from the same university in 1997. He obtained his doctoral degree in 2007 from the University of Technology and Life Sciences in Bydgoszcz, Poland. Since 1999 he teaches at the private university EAFIT, Medellin, Colombia.

As research fields his CV mentions Transport, Technical Diagnostics and Mining.

He published about 15 articles in scientific journals in Colombia, Poland, Germany and UK, mostly in English or German.

In terms of citations, we could only find citations to his last article, published in English in 2012 in the journal “Vehicle System Dynamics”, which received 2 citations.

He is teaching courses at EAFIT on Mechanical Engineering since 1999. On the bachelor level since 1999, on the master level since 2008.

Judging from the CV’s both peers have international experience as they both graduated abroad. Both the University of Sao Paulo and the AGH University of Science and Technology, Krakow, Poland, have a good international record. The Technical University of Bydgoszcz in Poland is a less known technical institution that was recently promoted to university. Both peers have a good publication record, unfortunately mainly in national journals.

Somewhat surprisingly none of the two seems to have experience in hydraulics, not in research nor in teaching. This might explain why the observers did not notice any discussions on the contents of the courses nor on the topic of hydraulics with the faculty of the programme.

The selection procedure of peers was outlined in the previous paragraph. The observers clearly noticed that the peers were active in the field of study of engineering. They were well prepared (they had a CNA-training the day before) as they had clearly thoroughly studied the self-evaluation report and were without problems able to conduct the evaluation by asking pertinent questions to all the stakeholders.

In terms of academic qualifications, professional experience as well as quality assurance knowledge, the observers met with two peers with limited experience, as can be judged from their CV's. Their international scientific output is limited and none of them appears to be active in the field of study of hydraulics. It was their first assignment on behalf of CNA.

Concerning the size of the panel, the observation panel found the panel of peers extremely small. The observers would like to advocate adding to the panel an international expert, who would guarantee an international comparison of the study programme, and possibly a student.

So, in conclusion, the observers met with a panel of peers which are active in research – some of it published in international journals - and in teaching and have an international background through their own previous studies. They conducted the evaluation in a professional way. The observers, however, would have preferred a team of peers with a research and teaching record in the field of this study programme, and would have appreciated as an extra team member an international expert – in terms of teaching and research experience - also in the field of this study programme.

3.2.2. The procedure

This section of the observation report is mainly based on the ECA Code of Good Practice. Here the observations concerning the ECA standards relating to the accreditation procedure and standards are presented.

The procedure is in line with the ECA Code of Good Practice.

The on-site visit included discussions with all the stakeholders and included also a site visit of the premises, including the library and the research facilities.

The panel of peers is expected to advise CNA on the quality of the proposed study programme by using CNA's framework of factors, characteristics and indicators. The observers were happy to see that the peers did not stick too closely to this framework, but that they had open discussions with all the stakeholders involved. The panel kept track and was efficient. The atmosphere was marked by a polite but straightforward and open-minded approach.

During the site visit and the many interviews with the stakeholders of this programme, they made clear that they had studied the self-evaluation report critically and thoroughly. They very often asked very pertinent questions about the different quality aspects of the programme, without following too closely the indicators of the self-evaluation report.

The peers were critical at the appropriate moments. One example. The peers noticed that the SER of the programme indicated under "Vision" that the programme wants to establish itself as a leader in the formation of professionals in the area of hydraulics, with links to other universities and with institutes and research groups both nationally and internationally. The peers asked politely but pertinently how they had established themselves as "leaders" and in particular asked how many contacts they had had with foreign research groups and how many students or faculty they recently had exchanged with such groups. None.

A final comment that the observers would like to make on the procedure is that in their opinion a panel visit of 2.5 days is unnecessarily long. Most interviews with stakeholders started with power point presentations of these stakeholders, in which the peers (and observers) are overloaded with information that they already have or which is sometimes irrelevant for this particular study programme. The observers would advise to skip such long presentations or to limit them to 5 or 10 minutes so that the peers can immediately start asking pertinent questions.

3.2.3. Learning Outcomes

How and by what means is the assessment of achieved learning outcomes taken into account during the procedure?

The topic of learning outcomes is in the eyes of the observers the most critical point of this observation visit. Strictly speaking they found no attention for the intended learning outcomes nor for the verification of the acquired learning outcomes during the programme evaluation. Nevertheless the observers are of the opinion that both aspects (intended and acquired learning outcomes) are indirectly verified for this programme.

Intended learning outcomes

In terms of intended learning outcomes the observers have noticed a paragraph of only 7.5 lines in the introduction of the SER, entitled “Profile of the outgoing students”. It describes in a very general way what the outgoing engineering student is supposed to know and to be able to do. The observers would advise CNA to invite all study programmes to have such a paragraph but more elaborated than just 7,5 lines, but rather a full page, explaining in a more detailed fashion the expected learning outcomes and competences of the outgoing students at the end of their studies.

Another reason not to condemn this study programme because of lack of defining its learning outcomes, is the binary system of quality assurance described earlier. As mentioned before, the content of the study programme is evaluated by another agency, CONICET, in connection with the registration of this programme in the *Registro Calificado*.

Acquired learning outcomes

The observers had discussions with the CNA councillors about the evaluation of the acquired learning outcomes. It is clear that such an evaluation is not (yet) in the line of thought and definitely not foreseen in the planning of the accreditation framework of CNA in the near future. Nevertheless, the observers are of the opinion that the acquired learning outcomes of the students are of international level. This opinion is based on indirect evidence:

- The duration of the study programme is much longer than equivalent study programmes in Europe. A university master’s programme for hydraulic engineers in Europe would typically last 5 years: a 3 year bachelor programme and a 2-year master programme. In Colombia it lasts more than 3 years longer: the bachelor programme lasts 5 years and the master’s programme, which is planned to last 2 years, in practise has a (measured) average duration of 3.5 years.

- The observers are of the opinion that the master thesis work in this programme is much heavier than in Europe. A thesis project which is planned to last 0.5 years typically lasts 1.5 years since students are expected to collect their experimental data themselves, analyse them and reach conclusions. The observers have the impression that such thesis projects are already approaching doctoral projects and would suggest reducing the work load to a more reasonable level.
- Although an evaluation of the acquired learning outcomes is not performed by the visitation panel of peers, we have explained earlier that Colombia has a state exam system to control the acquired learning outcomes, at least at the bachelor level.
- It is likely that study programmes of accredited universities are of substantially higher level than those of non-accredited institutions, based on the qualifications of the staff. The observers were informed by CNA that, while the average number of professors with Ph.D. at higher education institutions in Colombia is not more than 5 %, for institutions accredited by CNA this percentage amounts to 50 % and is steadily increasing. Indeed the programme visited had 9 professors with Ph.D. on a total of 14.
- Finally, the level of the outgoing students was discussed with a delegation of the working field. About ten employers, clearly active in the field of hydraulics, showed up for the meeting and they employed graduates from UNAM as well as graduates from other universities. They were themselves graduates in hydraulics from different universities. Several of them stated that they were satisfied with the level of the outgoing students and when asked to compare the level of UNAM graduates to the level of alumni of other universities they stated that the level of the students from UNAM and the Universidad de los Andes was clearly above average in Colombia.

So, based on these indirect observations, the observers are of the opinion that as well the intended as the acquired learning outcomes are probably comparable to similar study programmes in Europe. The peers, who both have international study experience, expressed the same opinion in conversations with the observers.

The observers also want to note that in Europe the notions of learning outcomes, skills, competences and the evaluation of their acquisition are still not used in a fully comprehensive way by all agencies, even by MULTRA-signatories.

Nevertheless the observers strongly advise CNA to introduce a formal verification of the acquired learning outcomes in future evaluations. This aspect will become especially relevant when establishing joint programmes with European Institutions.

3.2.4. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 14

<i>Standard</i>	The accreditation procedures must include self-documentation/-evaluation by the higher education institution and external review (as a rule on site)
<i>Question</i>	- <i>How is the accreditation procedure structured?</i>
<i>Reference points</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-documentation/-evaluation and external review are part of the accreditation procedure - External reviews encompass on site visits at the higher education institutions - The external review team is instructed clearly about its tasks - The accreditation organisation provides specific regulations in case of ex ante-accreditations

The CNA accreditation documentation includes several relevant texts which are available on the CNA website. There are guidelines about the accreditation procedure and about the self-evaluation report and about the site visit. The 2.5 day site visit is an essential part of the accreditation procedure. Two peers are selected from a well-designed database of peers and are thoroughly trained about the process, through regional training sessions, and in the case of inexperienced peers – like in the observed case - through a one-day long briefing before the actual site visit.

3.2.5. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 15

<i>Standard</i>	The accreditation procedures must guarantee the independence and competence of the external panels or teams
<i>Question</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>How is the independence of external panels guaranteed?</i> - <i>Are selection criteria for expert panels set up?</i>
<i>Reference points</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selection criteria for external panels/expert committees are set up and published by the accreditation organisation. - Selection criteria assure competence and independence of external experts - Independence of the experts is assured by a written statement - The decision about the composition of the expert team is made by the accreditation organisation in a transparent way

CNA has a clear procedure for setting up their database of experts (through frequent calls for candidates and evaluations of the candidates). The Council is supposed to select two peers from this database with adequate expertise. The observers were somewhat surprised to encounter

two peers who performed the evaluation professionally, who had studied abroad, who were active in research – some of it published in international journals - and in teaching, but in the more general field of mechanical engineering (and the subfields of respectively robotics and transport) and not in the field of hydraulic engineering,

In the opinion of the observers a real evaluation by peers of the contents of the programme can only be fruitful and effective if the peers are experts in the field of the study programme.

The independence of the candidates is assured by clear ethical rules and a written statement by the peers.

3.2.6. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 16

<i>Standard</i>	The accreditation procedures must be geared at enhancement of quality
<i>Question</i>	- Which elements and mechanisms within the accreditation process are used to enhance quality at the higher education institution?
<i>Reference points</i>	- The accreditation process contains elements that promote quality development and improvement of the higher education institution - The accreditation process should respect autonomy, identity and integrity of the higher education institutions

The whole accreditation process of CNA is aimed at quality enhancement.

The many indicators in the accreditation process are meant to measure the quality of the study programme in order to derive recommendations aimed at quality enhancement. During the actual site visit the observers witnessed that several such recommendations were given (e.g. on the heavy load of the thesis work).

The Colombian accreditation procedure is voluntary which respects the autonomy of the institution to a much higher level than in many European countries where accreditation is compulsory.

The observers also learned from CNA officials that regional aspects are taken into account in the evaluation process of higher education institutions.

3.2.7. ECA Code of Good Practice: standard 17

<i>Standard</i>	The accreditation standards must be made public and comply with European practices taking into account the development of agreed sets of quality standards
<i>Questions</i>	- Which are the quality standards and criteria used for accreditation procedures? - Do they meet international standards?

<i>Reference points</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The quality standards and criteria used in the accreditation procedures correspond to European good practices - The quality standards and criteria are made public - The process of formulation of the quality standards and criteria is transparent and involves all important stakeholders
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In 2102 the agency was evaluated and found to comply with the GGP of INQAAHE. The publication policy of CNA was one of the aspects that were evaluated in this report. CNA publishes its accreditation model, guidelines, procedures and finally also the decisions. All these documents are available on the web and were also made available for the observers.

CNA consults its stakeholders through different forms: they have meetings with the institutions, they participate in events organized by the Ministry of Education, and they organize national and regional workshops about the evaluations and quality assurance. These meetings are not only meant to spread information about CNA procedures, but also to consult the stakeholders. During the observation mission the observers were e.g. impressed by the large turnout of representatives from the employers, former students and students that showed up for the interviews, and even more by the lively discussions that took place between these representatives and the peers.

We have already mentioned a peculiar aspect of the “publication of decisions” policy: only the positive decisions are published, and only the positive part of these decisions (“fortalezas”).

4. Recommendation to the MULTRA members

Before the formulation of a final recommendation to the MULTRA members it is important to remember the aim of the MULTRA agreement. This is an agreement between agencies that have enough confidence in each others’ accreditation procedures so that they can trust accreditation decisions taken by other MULTRA-members whose accredited programmes or institutions take part in joint programmes. It thus mainly means that the MULTRA members can trust that collaborating accredited study programmes are of a similar level and that internal quality assurance is in place at the respective institutions. It does not mean that the accreditation procedures are necessarily very similar, but it means that the outcome of the procedure can be trusted.

With this in mind, the observers recommend that CNA Colombia be invited to sign the MULTRA-agreement.

Not because they rigorously apply standards and criteria that are fully in line with ECA's principles. But because a CNA accreditation, despite the observation of a few shortcomings in the procedure described below, is a label of excellence in Colombia, attributed after a rigorous evaluation procedure to a minority of programmes and to an even smaller minority of institutions, which are of sufficient quality to be recognized as partners in joint programmes with European partners. The observers are of the opinion that the contribution from CNA-accredited programmes to such joint programmes can be automatically recognized by MULTRA-members.

In the opinion of the observers there are, however, two crucial aspects in the accreditation procedure where CNA is found to comply substantially but not fully to what is expected from MULTRA signatories.

1. Peers number, level, international

Although the peers in this observation visit were found (from their CV) to be active in research – some of it published in international journals - and in teaching and to have an international background through their own previous studies, and although they conducted the evaluation in a professional way, they did not have a research nor teaching record in the field of the specific specialized study programme (hydraulic engineering) they had to evaluate, but in other subfields of mechanical engineering (robotics, traffic). This inhibited to some extent discussions between the peers and the faculty on the contents of the programme.

The observers also found a panel of only two peers to be rather limited in size and would have appreciated a somewhat larger panel. They would have loved to see as an extra team member an international expert – in terms of teaching and research experience - in the field of this study programme.

2. Learning outcomes

Strictly speaking, the observers found no attention for the intended learning outcomes nor for the verification of the acquired learning outcomes during the programme evaluation. Nevertheless the observers are of the opinion that both aspects (intended and acquired learning outcomes) are indirectly verified for this programme.

The intended learning outcomes are mentioned in a very condensed way in the Self-evaluation Report and they are partly verified by another agency, CONACES, which verifies the study programme.

The acquired learning outcomes are also – at least for bachelor programmes - verified by another external procedure (state exams). Other indirect factors, such as the much longer study period in Colombia to reach the final degree, the thesis work which is much heavier than in Europe, the much higher fraction of professors with Ph.D. at accredited universities compared to other higher education institutions in Colombia, the appreciation of the professional field for the output level of students graduating at CNA accredited institutions, gave the observers sufficient confidence in the acquired learning outcomes of the graduating students.

The observers also want to make the side remark at this stage that also for some other MULTRA-signatories the evaluation of the acquired learning outcomes is not (yet) fully comprehensive, and suggest that also CNA be given some time to implement a more formal learning outcome procedure.

The observers want to conclude with three final recommendations:

1. The observers strongly insist that CNA follows up on the comments in this report concerning the panel of peers and concerning a more formal introduction of the concept of learning outcomes in their procedures.
2. The observers recommend to the MULTRA signatories that they verify progress in CNA in this respect upon a future prolongation of the MULTRA agreement.
3. The observers also recommend that MULTRA-members evaluate after a number of years the experience gained by MULTRA members which participated in joint programmes with CNA-accredited programmes.

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