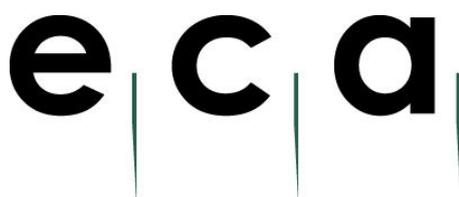


SINAES – Sistema Nacional
de Acreditación de la Educación
Superior (Costa Rica)

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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

Accreditation organisation observed:	Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (SINAES)
Country	Costa Rica
Accreditation procedure regarding:	Licenciatura in Microbiology and Clinical Chemistry of the Universidad de Costa Rica
Date(s) of the observation:	20-24 May 2013
Name/organisation of the observers	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 system

In July 2010 SINAES 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) after a site visit by an international panel in March 2010. The INQAAHE GGP are very close to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The accreditation framework of SINAES has been thoroughly analysed by INQAAHE and the evaluation report is available on the INQAAHE website

[\[http://www.inqaahe.org/main/professional-development/review/inqaahe-review-reports\]](http://www.inqaahe.org/main/professional-development/review/inqaahe-review-reports)

We refer to this recent report for a more detailed description and evaluation of the structure of the accreditation framework of SINAES 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.

The higher education system of Costa Rica consists of 5 public universities, 53 private universities and 5 international universities, offering 1,270 study programmes according to information provided by SINAES based on official data from the Office of Planning for Higher Education (OPES) of CONARE, the National Council of Rectors. Costa Rica has a binary system of quality control in higher education. The contents of study programmes offered by public higher education institutions is controlled by CONARE (*Consejo Nacional de Rectores*) and by CONESUP (*Consejo Nacional de Enseñanza Superior*), the National Higher Education Council, for private universities. This system guarantees minimum quality standards in the contents of the courses offered.

The SINAES accreditation is an extra label of excellence. It is voluntary and open to public as well as to private institutions of higher education. At this moment SINAES only accredits university bachelor and *licenciatura* programmes, and not yet master or doctoral programmes, and also not (yet) institutions, as they are allowed to do by recent legislation. This situation is expected to change in the near future, as indicated by SINAES. The agency already has a graduate assessment model, and it has already put out a call for these programmes. At present, seven programmes are in the self-assessment phase, and three programmes are awaiting their external peer assessments, scheduled for September; therefore the corresponding decisions by the Council can be expected by the end of 2013.

Similarly, SINAES has initiated the process to accredit study programmes for the para-university sector, which has also been authorized by recent legislation, to fill an important gap in the system for educational quality. It is interesting to note that for this para-university sector the model has only 49 criteria, due to lessons learned – according to SINAES - with respect to the necessary simplification of the model and the process.

Since the creation of SINAES in 1999 only 69 different programmes received accreditation by SINAES, of which 30 already have been re-accredited for a second or third time. Three quarters of these accreditations were attributed to programmes at public universities and one quarter to private universities. So presently only 5 % of all existing higher education programmes offered in Costa Rica are accredited by SINAES. At this moment SINAES handles about 10 accreditation procedures per year.

An accreditation by SINAES is meant to reflect high quality standards and is indeed propagated by SINAES as a label of excellence that only the highest quality programmes can obtain. In order to stimulate the SINAES accreditation system, in the governmental job market priority is given to graduates from accredited programmes, as authorized by the 2010 Law for the Strengthening of SINAES

It is important to indicate that SINAES also has kept pace in the revalidation of accreditation processes - reaccreditation - which largely reflects the degree to which the culture of quality has penetrated these programmes. Moreover, as stipulated by the SINAES accreditation process, the agency supports the accredited study programmes with annual or biannual oversight of actions for publicly committed improvement.

SINAES also works hard on building capacity in Costa Rican Institutions of Higher Education through training, advising, and the development of academic activities that foster and encourage opportunities for quality and also have the unique feature of bringing together academics from the Costa Rican public and private sectors.

Similarly, this year SINAES has started implementing an innovative programme to promote a culture of quality, whose audiences include high school youth, parents, employers, opinion shapers, and other publics. This effort is being done through the execution of various communication strategies, such as radio spots, active participation in fairs, publicity, and exhibits about the benefits of accreditation. These efforts will enable research to evaluate outcomes and impacts in the short to medium term and thereby strengthen the Accreditation System of Costa Rica. In this regard, accreditation is one of the five major areas in which SINAES works: namely, Accreditation, Training, Research, Culture of Quality and Institutional Strengthening

Accreditation framework

The evaluation of a higher education programme, such as the one that was subject to this observation process, happens according to guidelines spelled out in a 73-page document that the observers received, entitled *“Manual de Acreditación Oficial de Carreras de Grado del Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior - publ. 2009”*. It can be downloaded from the website of SINAES. The evaluation “standards” in this text are grouped into 6 dimensions, 21 components, 171 criteria, 34 standards and 348 evidences. “Criteria” are defined as a priori defined principles that should be in place. “Standards” are norms or conditions that should be fulfilled for the programme to be of acceptable quality. The 348 evidences are the qualitative and quantitative data that should be delivered by the programme so that the evaluators can make a judgment based on these data.

The 5 dimensions into which the standards of the framework of the framework are grouped are:

1. Admissibility of the programme
2. Relation to the surroundings (promotion, admission process)
3. Means (study programme, personnel, infrastructure)
4. Educational process
5. Outcome

An important aspect of the self-evaluation report is that the programme has to indicate for each of the 171 criteria and 34 standards their own opinion of the strengths and the weaknesses of the programme. For each of the 21 components the self-evaluation report has to specify the number of criteria for which they feel that they are fully compliant, partly compliant or not compliant.

Finally, next to the self-evaluation report, the programme has to submit a preliminary improvement plan, the “*Compromiso preliminar de mejoramiento*” in which the programme explains how they want to repair the shortcomings that they themselves have discovered in their programme during their self-analysis. Upon accreditation, and after a consultation in person between the evaluation panel and the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación*, which takes the accreditation decision, this preliminary improvement plan is converted into a final improvement plan, which is signed by the rector, the responsible of the study programme and the president of SINAES. An external revisor is then appointed by the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* who annually will control and report to the *Consejo* on the advances made by the programme in their improvement plan.

In the eyes of the observers the evaluation framework used by SINAES fulfils its expectations as it allows making quality judgments along the same lines as used by other MULTRA-members. On the other hand the framework gives the impression to be “over-doing” it as it is extremely heavy and puts a strong bureaucratic burden on the institutions and the evaluation panel. A typical self-evaluation report against this framework together with the many required annexes easily measures several hundred pages. The basic text of the self-evaluation report of the Microbiology programme visited in this observation visit counted 307 pages, without the annexes. The total volume of another self-evaluation report, including the annexes, that came up in the discussions between the observers and a group of peers, measured 800 pages. The observers are also afraid that a self-evaluation report based on this rigid framework is not so much a critical self-reflection, which it is meant to be, but rather an extremely detailed technical analysis whether a programme is compliant with a conceptual ideal model. Such an extensive evaluation framework contrasts strongly with tendencies in Europe to reduce the bureaucratic burden of accreditation procedures as much as possible, where even sometimes limits are imposed on the number of pages that can be submitted.

Another aspect of this heavy burden is the duration of the evaluation visit by the peers, which lasts one full week. A typical evaluation visit in Europe would last one or two days.

The observers therefore would like to make the recommendation to SINAES to reflect on a possible reduction of the bureaucratic burden of their evaluation framework. Several of the indicators are redundant, others are common for the whole institution and hence can be evaluated in a kind of “institutional” accreditation. It also seems logical to use a lighter framework upon re-accreditation of programmes that have been accredited before and since then were subject to a follow-up procedure.

The observers were happy to notice that the evaluation panel of the Microbiology programme in their oral report to the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* made similar recommendations. Upon the completion of their report, the observers were informed that SINAES authorities, such as the National Accreditation Council, are aware of the need to revise and simplify the evaluation model to make it more flexible, and that they have already made decisions to do so. The Council plans to have a new version of the evaluation model ready in August 2014. The methodology for the review of the present system includes, among other things, a review of models and processes from international agencies certified in best practices, consultations with national and international experts, participation of different national sectors (quality stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, students, teachers, university authorities and graduates) and the development of specific studies in key areas for national and international quality such as teaching - learning, research and its development, and basic core academic studies.

Learning outcomes in the SINAES accreditation framework

As well the intended learning outcomes of the study programme as the verification of the acquired learning outcomes are both part of the criteria of the SINAES accreditation framework and the panel of peers is expected to verify whether these are of international level. For all individual courses in the programme, the intended learning outcomes have to be specified. The observers noticed that also the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* in their oral discussion with the panel members, in the presence of the observers, asked for an explicit statement about the international level of the learning outcomes of this study programme.

Joint programmes

There are no special provisions in the SINAES accreditation framework for joint programmes. When the observers inquired about this they were told that so far no joint programmes have asked for accreditation. When such programmes would apply for accreditation the staff at SINAES answered that they had the intention to make sure that all partners in the joint programme would be evaluated. They hoped that if SINAES would be allowed to join MULTRA this would stimulate the accreditation and probably also the creation of joint programmes. Despite the large number of indicators the accreditation framework of SINAES does not pay attention to international mobility of students. On the other hand, the framework does enquire about the international profile of their staff in the field of research.

Evaluation panels

SINAES has a high-quality procedure to select peers for the evaluation panels. SINAES maintains a data bank of over 1.000 names of national peers. These were initially invited to apply and selected after a review on the basis of academic quality criteria. SINAES organizes training sessions for the development of the evaluation skills of the peers.

International peers are obtained through contacts with foreign Quality Assurance Agencies.

When an accreditation mission is due, the SINAES secretariat 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 *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación*.

For the present site visit the panel consisted of three experts, two of them international. This inclusion (two international peers and one national peer) is maintained by SINAES on all panels for the evaluation of undergraduate study programmes. SINAES emphasizes the national agency's effort to include two international experts as a differentiating element to better ensure the internationalization of the quality assurance processes.

The observers want to mention that there are no students in the evaluation panels, nor on the decision making bodies. Students do, however, participate on the commissions for self-assessment for each study programme and exchanges with students in the study programmes undergoing accreditation are included in the programme for the external peer visit *in situ*.

SINAES 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 Costa-Rican evaluation system involves some kind of ranking (see below) in the re-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 or at least having some overlap in the composition of evaluation panels evaluating related programmes.

Decision making process

The final accreditation conclusions, after analysing and discussing the reports of the peers, are taken by the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación*. The eight *Consejeros* on the Council are all respected university academics. Four of them are elected by the rectors of the state universities which are members of SINAES, four of them are elected by the rectors of the private universities which are members of SINAES. There is no open call for candidates for membership of the *Consejo*. The fact that public and private universities collaborate on equal grounds within SINAES is highly appreciated by the various groups of stakeholders the observers had discussions with. This was stressed by SINAES as an important aspect of SINAES' structure, as the only institutionalized entity wherein diverse sectors of the country's universities (public, private and international) coincide. Apparently since the creation of SINAES the relationships between these sectors have strongly improved.

The *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* meets weekly.

One typical aspect of the accreditation procedure in Costa Rica, which is rather uncommon for European QA agencies, is that each panel of experts, on the last day of their evaluation mission, has a meeting in person with the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación*. In this meeting the panel presents its provisional report (*Informe de Salida*) and discusses with the *Consejo* the strengths and the weaknesses it has encountered. Within two weeks after the site visit the panel has to submit its final evaluation report after which the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* takes a decision about the accreditation, the accreditation period and the improvement plan.

The observers were happy to be invited to the meeting of the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* in which the panel of the Microbiology programme evaluation presented its provisional report. They witnessed an interesting discussion about several points in the provisional report about which the *Consejo* asked for further clarification.

At the same occasion the observers had also a discussion with the *consejeros* about the MULTRA project.

Another peculiar aspect of the SINAES accreditation procedure is that the members of the panel of experts have to submit their individual preliminary evaluation of the programme, based on

the self-evaluation report, before they meet for the site visit. Apparently this has been introduced to avoid that panel members come unprepared to the site visit.

In Costa Rica there is no interference from the Ministry of Education in the accreditation procedure. CONARE and SINAES are by law fully independent from any political influence. In this regard, it is interesting to note that according to the Constitution of Costa Rica the evaluation of university courses and programmes is among the matters placed under the jurisdiction of state higher education institutions (hereafter referred to as SHEIs), since this academic activity is part of their duties and it is covered by the powers of constitutional academic freedom they possess. The Costa Rican constitution gives the SHEIs the maximum range of independence that may be given to any public entity. In the scope of this constitutional authority, the SHEIs created SINAES by means of an agreement. Its main purpose was “to certify the level of quality of the courses and study programmes undergoing accreditation, ensuring efficiency, criteria for quality and the standards applied in that process.” Therefore, SINAES has, as do the SHEIs, the public authority to determine its own organization and government. It can approve its own policies, strategic plans and annual work plans independently from the rest of Costa Rican Public Administration and set its own rules and regulations, approving and updating the procedures, criteria and standards for the evaluation that freely determines the awarding of accreditations.”

Decision Scale

Decisions by the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* are in principle “pass” or “no-pass” decisions. Re-accreditation can in some cases be “postponed” meaning that some time is given to the programme to make important corrections before a final decision is made.

Although SINAES is not using a formal ranking of programmes, there is an implicit ranking in the accreditation term attributed upon re-accreditation. While the initial accreditation is for up to 4 years, a re-accreditation is attributed for a period of 2 to 8 years, while longer terms mean increasing quality found during the evaluation.

Appeal

The SINAES accreditation system contains an appeal procedure. We learned that a few successful appeals were launched because of disagreement of the accredited programme with

the accreditation period attributed to the programme, when compared with other accredited programmes. SINAES has also received requests for the reconsideration of the awarding of non-accreditation decisions or for the awarding of deferred decisions.

Publication policy

The publication policy of accreditation decisions by SINAES can be described as *minimum minimorum*. Only positive decisions are published and the publication is limited to mentioning that a particular programme has been accredited. SINAES has chosen not to publish negative accreditation decisions. There are several reasons for this policy but the main concern is the fear for bad publicity of weaker programmes. According to SINAES, this policy reflects the fact that, since accreditation is voluntary in Costa Rica, the agency does not want to discourage or punish those who decide to undertake a process for improvement.

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.

The observers nevertheless would recommend to SINAES to increase the public interest and the information for potential students by publishing the main findings, and at least the strengths (*fortalezas*), that are reported by the peers for the accredited programmes.

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: 3
Gender balance exclusively male (*)

EXPERTISE INCLUDED IN THE PANEL OF THE OBSERVED PROCEDURE

EXPERTISE	INCLUDED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experience in quality assurance in higher education 	Yes

• appropriate academic qualifications and scientific or professional reputation in the relevant area(s)	Yes
• relevant international experience that provides a basis for making international comparisons	Yes
• knowledge on teaching and learning methods	Yes
• expertise in development, design, provision and evaluation of higher education programmes	Yes
• 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	Yes

(*) During the visit to SINAES premises, the observers had a meeting with a group of peers that previously had participated in SINAES accreditation procedures. Gender balance was observed in that meeting.

The experts profile met with the requirements of the accreditation procedures; the three of them were of renowned prestige in the field of microbiology with a wide research and teaching record in the field and with previous experience in quality assurance. They demonstrated an extensive knowledge and understanding of the standards and accreditation procedures which applied in an autonomous and independent way. The decisions of the experts were taken by consensus.

Concerning the panel composition and according to the ECA principles, the observation panel would like to recommend having in the panel a representative from the labour market and possibly a student.

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. All principles are reflected in the procedure.

The observers were invited to attend the site visit at Universidad de Costa Rica including internal discussions of the panel and meetings with the stakeholders. The visit also included a site visit of the premises, including the library, research facilities and one of hospitals where the students develop their internship.

Before the site visit the peers had thoroughly revised the institution's self-evaluation report and prepared a preliminary report. During the visit, the peers showed a profound knowledge of the programme and focused their questions to key points they considered as weakness or areas of improvement.

The atmosphere of the meetings was marked by a polite but straightforward and open-minded approach and the site visit schedule was followed as planned.

The observers want to emphasize the high attendance of stakeholders to the meetings, showing their commitment to the programme.

The role of the SINAES project manager assigned to the accreditation procedure was very active to ensure the quality of the process and giving technical and practical support to the evaluation panel.

The observers would like to make a final comment on the procedure related to the length of the site visit: in their opinion, a panel visit of 4 days is unnecessarily long. As mentioned before, the observers strongly recommend reducing the duration of the visit, possibly to no more than 2 days.

3.2.3. Learning Outcomes

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

Adequate attention is paid to learning outcomes. The observers are of the opinion that both the intended and the acquired learning outcomes, are adequately verified for this programme.

Intended learning outcomes

The recently approved new study programme has been designed in terms of intended learning outcomes and includes a clear profile for the outgoing students.

The study programme also formulated the intended learning outcomes for each of the course modules. The panel revised the intended learning outcomes of the courses included in the study programme and noticed that for a few courses they were not yet available. The panel made a recommendation on this aspect.

Acquired learning outcomes

The panel performed also an evaluation of the acquired learning outcomes using different approaches:

- Revision of theses – The programme supplied a sample of theses that were evaluated by the panel during the site visit.
- Interview with employers – The competences of the graduates were discussed with employers.
- The discussion was focused on how well the graduates profile meets labour market needs; including the strengths and weaknesses.
-

The panel of peers concluded that the intended and the acquired learning outcomes of the students are of international level.

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>	- 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 SINAES accreditation documentation includes an extensive list of documents which are all available on the SINAES website. There are guidelines about the accreditation procedure, the self-evaluation report, the site visit and the preparation of the evaluation report. The accreditation procedure is clearly divided in several steps:

- Self-evaluation
- Analysis (of the self-evaluation)

- External evaluation
- Decision making for accreditation

The site visit is an essential part of the accreditation procedure. The peers are selected from a well-designed database of peers and are thoroughly trained about the process.

The documents contain clear indications directed to the panel about their tasks and responsibilities.

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

The guidelines for the External Evaluation include the selection criteria for the panel set-up.

Experts are selected among those registered in the SINAES database. To promote the participation of international peers, SINAES has signed agreements with other Quality Assurance Agencies to share experts (for example ANECA).

Selection criteria include:

- Knowledge on the specific field of the programme to be accredited.
- Knowledge of quality assurance evaluation procedures
- Experience in university management
- Academic degree

In addition the guidelines include criteria to assure the independence of the peers.

The peers participating in the programme accreditation procedure observed fully meet the established requirements.

The guidelines also include a detailed description of the selection of peers which is done by the “Consejo Nacional de Acreditación”.

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 accreditation procedure in Costa Rica is voluntary which places the autonomy of the institution towards accreditation to a much higher level than in many European countries where accreditation is compulsory. The whole accreditation process of SINAES is aimed at quality enhancement.

For example, the self- evaluation report prepared by the programmes always includes an improvement plan which needs to be revised periodically. In addition the evaluation report prepared by the panel gives an especial relevance to the recommendations for improvement

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>	- 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

In 2010 SINAES was evaluated and found to comply with the GGP of INQAAHE, which are very close to the ESG.

SINAES 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.

During the meetings with the stakeholders in SINAES the audiences confirmed their participation in the continuous improvement of the accreditation procedure. SINAES consults its stakeholders on a regular basis.

During the observation mission the observers were 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.

As a result of the accreditation procedures, SINAES publishes in the web page a list of all accredited programmes. In order to increase the transparency of the process, the observers recommend publishing some additional information related to the results of the accreditation procedure included in the accreditation report.

4. Recommendation to the MULTRA members

The observers are in full agreement that SINAES applies consistently and rigorously a set of standards and criteria that are in line with ECA's requirements. Therefore the observers recommend that the MULTRA members accept SINAES as a member of the group, without any restriction other than the need to pay specific attention to one aspect:

Since the procedure observed was not related to a joint programme, and since SINAES has not yet evaluated a joint programme, SINAES should take into consideration ECA's guidelines in case of accreditation of such programmes.

The observers want to conclude with two final recommendations:

1. The observers strongly advise to reduce the bureaucratic burden of accreditation procedures in Costa Rica. In particular it would be desirable to reduce the number of indicators and the size of the self-evaluation report, possibly by defining a maximum recommended length. On the other hand the observers recommend reducing the duration of the site visit to the order of two days as is customary in European accreditation procedures.
2. Finally the observers recommend increasing the public information for potential students by publishing the main findings, and at least the strengths (fortalezas), that are reported by the peers for the accredited programmes.

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