Higher education in the Spanish education system comprises university education and non-university education, including advanced vocational training and advanced artistic education.

**Advanced vocational training**

In the case of non-university higher education, the Directorate-General for Vocational Training of the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities, wants to promote a Quality Plan with the following main objectives:

- the establishment of the Spanish Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Training (in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework)
- the launch of the Vocational Training Quality Network of the education system.

**Spanish Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Training**

It is taking shape, since 2007, in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training.

- It is a reference tool to supervise and contribute to the constant improvement of the quality of this type of provision, basically defined by common instruments, descriptors and quality indicators developed by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities and the most representative social agents.
- Its **general objective** is to guarantee and improve the quality of vocational training of the education system regarding systems (administrations involved) and institutions providing vocational training.

In this regard, **strategic lines** of action, focusing on the following points, are proposed:

- organise a system for the coordination of quality that safeguards and systematically develops quality in education and educational services, both at pedagogical and administration level
- converge with European recommendations regarding the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training as established by the European Parliament and the European Council
- implement the Spanish Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Training of the education system.

**Vocational Training Quality Network**

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, together with the education authorities, has established its structure and organisation:

- so that vocational training becomes a quality reference
- to strengthen the culture of improvement and quality assurance and innovation
- to propose strategies and coordinate planning, development and evaluation actions and
measures in order to improve the quality of education and services.


**Awards for Quality in Vocational Guidance and Training**

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities and the Cities of Ceuta and Melilla, promotes, encourages and organises the national competition **Spainskills** [2] and the participation of Spain in the international competitions **Worldskills International** [2] and **Worldskills Europe** [2].

**University education**

Quality assurance has specific features due to the autonomy granted to Spanish universities and the fact that education authorities, both regional and national, are held accountable.

In this regard, various initiatives and programmes have been implemented in order to improve evaluation and the quality of the university system.

**Act on Universities (2001)**

It establishes that quality promotion and assurance of Spanish universities, both at the national and international levels, is an essential aim of university policy. This evaluation has the following objectives:

- measure the performance of public university education and accountability towards society
- the transparency, comparison, cooperation and competitiveness of universities at the national and international levels
- improve teaching and research practice, as well as university management
- inform public authorities for decision-making within the scope of their powers
- inform society in order to promote excellence and student and teacher mobility.

These objectives must be achieved by establishing certain common criteria for quality assurance, which facilitate the evaluation, certification and accreditation of:

- studies leading to the award of official certificates which are valid throughout the country
- studies leading to the award of diplomas and certificates designed by universities and other higher education institutions
- activities, programmes, services and management of higher education institutions
- teaching, research and management activities of university teachers
- other activities and programmes that may be carried out as a consequence of teaching and research quality promotion by public authorities.

**National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)**

It is set up in 2002 as an external evaluation mechanism that, independently, reinforces the quality, transparency, cooperation and competitiveness of universities. Its functions are:

- accreditation and evaluation of university teachers
- evaluation of university degrees
- improvement of quality
- monitoring of results and report at university level
- evaluation of research activity
- participation in procedures for the standardisation and recognition of equivalences of Spanish university qualifications and correspondence of academic levels.
In order to contribute to modernising university higher education, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport set up in 2012 a Commission of Experts for the reform of the Spanish university system, whose objectives were to:

- implement systems for the external evaluation of the teaching and research activity
- promote quality research.
- encourage the specialisation of universities in different areas of knowledge.
- rationalise the degrees offered through the establishment of an efficiency standard, taking into account the number of students
- promote private investment
- overcome the deficit in the transfer of knowledge and technology to the productive sector
- encourage internationalisation and increasing participation of universities in the globalised knowledge society.

In 2013, the document 'Proposals for the Reform and Improvement of the Quality and Efficiency of the Spanish University System', presenting the findings of this working group, was handed over to the Minister by this Commission. There are five main points in the document:

- selection of teaching and research staff
- quality assurance
- university governance
- university funding
- university studies and degrees.

This report has been considered as the starting point for a dialogue process with all the key players involved in university life on the measures to be adopted in order to progressively modernise, internationalise and improve the quality of universities.

Since 2006, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation produces a Report on the state of the external evaluation of the quality of Spanish universities. This report provides a situational analysis of the impact of the external evaluation of the quality of the Spanish university system and its evolution with the aim of promoting improvement in both the processes and results of such evaluation.

The 2017 report focused on:

- analysis of evaluation processes aimed at improving the quality of official university degrees in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
- analysis of quality improvement in higher education centres and institutions
- keys to the impact of the results of the evaluation processes for research teaching staff
- reflections on quality improvement focused specifically on the objectives of university education.

**Responsible bodies**

**National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)**

Some of its most important functions are:

- promote the improvement of the teaching, research and management activities of universities
- contribute to the measurement of higher education performance according to objective
procedures and transparent processes
• provide public authorities with suitable information for decision-making
• inform society about the achievement of goals in university activities.

In 2003, the Agency became a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); in 2008, it joined the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR); and, in 2010, it became the first European agency adhering to the Guidelines of Good Practice of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The Strategic Plan 2019-2023 [5], published by ANECA, is a reference document for the establishment of medium-term objectives that will serve as a framework for the annual operational plans and the development of the Agency's future projects.

The strategic and specific goals of this new Plan are:

• to contribute to the promotion of the quality of the Spanish university system:
  ◦ effectively implementing the different programmes for evaluating the quality of university education
  ◦ contributing to the design of a teaching and research career model for teaching staff through the programmes that accredit the different figures of university lecturers
  ◦ carrying out the Agency's institutional assessment programmes
  ◦ developing other quality assurance programmes that contribute to the quality improvement of the university system
  ◦ ensuring an adequate selection of experts and evaluators in the various commissions for the assessment of courses, institutions and teachers.

• optimising the visualisation of the Agency's actions at a national and international level:
  ◦ involving the actors involved in higher education in the evaluation and accreditation programmes and in the different Agency actions
  ◦ extending the Agency's international presence by offering services linked to quality assurance
  ◦ maintaining ANECA's presence in international bodies in order to strengthen the internationalisation of Spanish higher education
  ◦ carrying out actions that involve and reinforce the role of the different stakeholders within the Agency.

• spreading the Agency's mission and the role it plays for the university system within society:
  ◦ contributing to the knowledge regarding the quality of the Spanish university system through the dissemination of reports and data about the different processes it carries out
  ◦ increasing external communication, reaching the media and society with objective information in order to generate trust
  ◦ improving internal communication that provides useful and cross-cutting information to the different divisions
  ◦ effectively addressing user needs and providing them with adequate resources and complaint processes.

• efficiently managing resources in order to contribute to the improvement of ANECA:
  ◦ optimising the Agency's quality and continuous improvement management systems
  ◦ strengthening ANECA's human team by promoting its development, motivation and efficiency
  ◦ managing economic resources effectively and efficiently
  ◦ developing the computer tools for managing the various ANECA programmes
  ◦ improving infrastructures and the presence of general services to facilitate ANECA's activities.

The Action Plan for 2019 [6] contains all the information on the activities that will be carried out by the
Agency, in its diverse areas of evaluation and contribution to the improvement of the Spanish university system, as well as a list of compliance indicators for each activity.

The activities to be developed in order to achieve the general improvement objective for the university education system are:

- evaluation of studies
- evaluation of teaching staff
- evaluation of institutions
- institutional, International Relations and Communication
- quality assessment
- management

**Agencies of the Autonomous Communities responsible for the evaluation of university education**

Together with the ANECA, they contribute to the improvement of quality through the coordination and development of the evaluation, certification and accreditation of university studies, teachers and institutions. For that purpose, they provide university institutions with evaluation tools, although institutions themselves are in charge of drawing up and carrying out their own evaluation plans.

**General Assembly for University Policy**

It is the body for consultation, coordination and cooperation of the general university policy of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Without detriment to the powers conferred on the university coordination bodies of the Autonomous Communities, it has the following functions:

- establish and assess the general guidelines of university policy, its organisation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and its interrelationship with scientific and technological research policies
- draw up, inform, consult and advise on the general organisation and long-term programme of university education, which covers the necessary human, material and financial resources for the public university services
- approve coordination criteria regarding evaluation, certification and accreditation activities, aimed at promoting and guaranteeing the quality and efficiency of universities
- suggest and assess measures in order to promote collaboration between universities and companies
- coordinate the drawing up and monitoring of reports on the application of the principle of gender equality at university.

Every two years, the Assembly draws up a report on the situation of the university system and its funding, putting forward proposals to improve its quality and efficiency with the aim of ensuring financial sufficiency and the right to education in conditions of equality.

It is comprised of five members appointed by its President, apart from those in charge of university education in the Governing Councils of the Autonomous Communities.

**Social Council in each university**

This body, by which society participates in university life, supervises universities’ financial activities and the performance of their services. It approves an annual action plan with the aim of promoting relations between universities and their cultural, professional, economic and social environment at
the service of the financing and quality of university activity.

In order to develop its functions, it is informed and advised by the ANECA and the evaluation bodies of the Autonomous Communities.

**Services Inspection in each university**

It is in charge of ensuring that all university institutions, departments, services and units operate correctly, structurally, functionally and administratively, as well as monitoring and controlling university activity.

**Approaches and methods for quality assurance**

*National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation* (ANECA): it coordinates and promotes the evaluation of the different aspects of the university system: studies, institutions and teachers

- **education authorities through their evaluation agencies**: they ensure compliance with basic quality standards in the design and implementation of studies, as well as among those taking part in a hiring process or a process to enter the civil service
- **universities**:  
  - they submit an annual report of their teaching and research activities to the Autonomous Community they depend on as well as to the General Assembly for University Policy  
  - they conduct an internal assessment of their activities, the work done by their teachers and the results of their students within their institutional improvement plans  
  - their Services Inspection verifies compliance with institutional responsibilities, as well as the organisation of teaching and non-teaching staff, and is in charge of opening information and disciplinary proceedings and processing applications for reports and procedures to monitor and evaluate the performance of the teaching staff.

**Programmes of the ANECA for the evaluation of institutions**

The ANECA develops its activity, i.e., evaluation, certification and accreditation by means of different programmes:

- **VERIFICA**: it evaluates the proposals of study plans designed in line with the European Higher Education Area
- **MONITOR**: it provides universities with an external appraisal on the implementation of their official degrees with a view to using this appraisal as an additional element to improve the training offered
- **ACREDITA**: it evaluates official university degrees before they are accredited. This evaluation is cyclical and has a double objective: check if degrees, once they have been implemented, are being developed in accordance with the initial project description and evaluate their main results
- **INTERNATIONAL QUALITY LABEL**: it offers the possibility of obtaining, apart from the national accreditation, an international quality label of renowned prestige: EURACE for degree programmes in Engineering and Euro-Inf for degrees in Computer Science.
Programmes of the ANECA for the evaluation of institutions

Participation in both programmes is voluntary.

- **DOCENTIA**: its aim is to support universities in the design of their own mechanisms to manage the quality of the teaching practice of university teachers and to contribute to their development and recognition.

- **AUDIT**: its purpose is to favour and promote the development and implementation of internal quality assurance systems at Spanish universities, and establish a procedure leading to the recognition and certification of such systems.

- **ACREDITACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL**: its aim is to evaluate applications for institutional accreditation of university centres, accreditation which is renewed before five years have elapsed since said accreditation is granted.

- **AUDIT INTERNACIONAL**: its objective is to certify the quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) located in third countries and/or geographical regions, as a contrasted tool that contributes to the improvement of the quality of their degrees and, therefore, the satisfaction of their stakeholders.

Programmes of the ANECA for the evaluation of teachers

Participation in both programmes is compulsory for teachers who participate in processes for the recruitment or access to the university teaching staff.

- **PEP**: it evaluates the teaching and research experience and the academic qualifications of prospective teachers in order to have access to the positions of associate teacher, assistant teacher -both requiring a PhD- and private university teacher established by the Act Modifying the Act on Universities (2007).

- **ACADEMIA**: through Commissions for Accreditation, it carries out the process of curricular evaluation for accreditation in order to have access to the positions of university senior lecturer and university senior professor.

- **CNEAI**: The National Committee for the Evaluation of Research Activity (CNEAI) evaluates the research activity of university teachers and the scientific staff of the Spanish Higher Scientific Research Council (CSIC), so that they receive a productivity allowance.

Other evaluation activities

- Academic Publishing Quality Label: its objective is to recognize the best practices within Spanish university publishing and become a distinctive sign that both the agencies evaluating the research activity and the academic and research community can easily identify.