

Council of Universities

**National Plan for Quality
Assessment of Universities in Spain**

**Summary of the
Final Report
Second Round**

May 2000



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DE EDUCACIÓN,
CULTURA Y DEPORTE

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FOREWORD

The Plenum of the Council of Universities, during its session held the 1st of June, 2 000 at the University of Granada approved the present Annual Report on the quality of the Higher Education System, which is the result of the assessment process initiated by the *Orden de 20 de Abril de 1998 de convocatoria del Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades*, established by *RD 1947/1995 de 1 de diciembre*.

Of the four rounds of assessments carried out, only the first in 1996 and the second in 1998 have been completed. The 1999 exercise is at present being completed and the 2000 exercise has just started. Between the first two exercises, 22 per cent of all the existing degrees have been assessed; and when the four rounds of assessments have been completed, approximately 75 per cent of all the degrees will have been assessed.

The internal assessment process of the Higher Education System (including the Self-assessment Phase, the External Assessment and the Institutional Report) has an approximate duration of 12 months, plus the time required to study, analyse and synthesise the reports received and to draw up the final report. Although this may seem –and it is- a long period of time, at least a year and a half, in fact the first results, obtained from the internal reflection of the unit assessed (degree, department of service), are available in less than six months in most cases, which is when some of the actions addressed to improve the weaknesses observed are set up.

But all this information, which is the result of the internal process, can not be left in hundreds of reports and several thousand pages. Consequently it is necessary that a National Institution, in this case the Council of Universities, culminates this long process in the present annual report (about 25 000 registers and more than 50 variables), with the aim of informing the entire society about the quality of the Higher Education System, and in particular those persons who have to make decisions as regards the functioning of the Higher Education Institutions.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have participated in the different phases of the assessment process (teaching staff, administrative staff, undergraduates, postgraduates, external professionals, managers of the universities in their respective levels, officers, etc., that is, about 4 000 people) and the different institutions (Universities, Autonomous Agencies, Administrations of the Autonomous Communities, etc.) for the efforts made during all these months of work, and in particular the members of the team of experts who have drawn up the present document.

Vicente ORTEGA CASTRO
General Secretary of the Council of Universities

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1. INTRODUCCION

The National Plan for Quality Assessment of Universities - **PNECU** (*Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades*) was established in 1995 by the Council of Universities. The Plan formally institutionalised quality assessment in Spanish universities, as an extended and continuous process for the entire university system.

The stated objectives of the **PNECU** are four: (a) promoting quality processes in Spanish universities; (b) providing methodological tools to universities for this assessment process that would be homogeneous throughout the country and similar to processes used elsewhere in Europe; (c) providing society, especially students, relevant and reliable information about the quality of the institutions, their programs, services and scientific levels; and (d) providing accountability to the regional governments.

The **PNECU** is headed by the Council of Universities, a national organisation composed of representatives of the regional and national governments and the rectors of all universities. A Technical Committee composed of Council's officials and experts in evaluation is in charge of the process. The Plan evaluates teaching (in programs), research (in the departments related to programs assessed in teaching), and management (in services also related to the programs).

The Autonomous Communities of Andalucía and Catalonia have their own agencies which manage the **PNECU** in those regions. However, both the quantitative information and the main conclusions of the report "Process of Quality Assessment in the university system of Catalonia" (*Procés d'avaluació de la qualitat del sistema universitari a Catalunya. Informe 1999*), drawn up by the Agency for Quality in the University System of Catalonia have been taken into account. The general results of the Final Report of the 1998 Assessment carried out by the Unit for the Quality of Andalusian Universities (*Unidad para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas*) are also included in this report.

The methodology of the **PNECU** is the same that was used in former Spanish projects and similar to that currently used in most European countries. The first step of the process is a *self-study* made by the Internal Evaluation Committee of each program evaluated. This report has two purposes: to promote reliable information on the evaluated unit and promote awareness of quality issues in the university community. The second step is a *visit* by an External Evaluation Committee composed of experts in the field (academic and non-academic). They interview leaders, staff, and students in each evaluated unit and compare their findings to the self-study report. This External Committee sends a report following each visit to the Council of Universities. Third, the universities issues a published report synthesising the self-study and the External Committee report. This is the Final Program Report. When several programs are evaluated in the same university, the university must issue a University Evaluation Report summarising the whole process in that university.

The Technical Committee prepared written guidelines to standardise the process in participating universities. These guidelines define criteria and procedures, and establish the main points to be assessed and summarised in the committee reports. Nevertheless, the reports had the option to use a different structure.

The **PNECU** requires it to report on the results of each round of assessments. So far, three rounds have been carried out, the first one in 1996, the second in 1998, the third in 1999 and the fourth one, which is presently under way, covering the year 2000. In this report, an account of the activities undertaken in the second round and the results obtained is given.

The main aim of this report is to inform society and educational bodies about the assessment procedure followed and the results obtained, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses and putting forward new proposals to improve the quality of institutions..

This report has been elaborated by the Technical Committee with the support of a team of researchers and analysts (see Annex). All the various documents and reports produced along the whole assessment process have been used as a source of information in the elaboration of the final report. Together with this report, individual reports for all the participating universities have been drawn up, in which specific aspects of the results of the assessment carried out in each institution are analysed in detail.

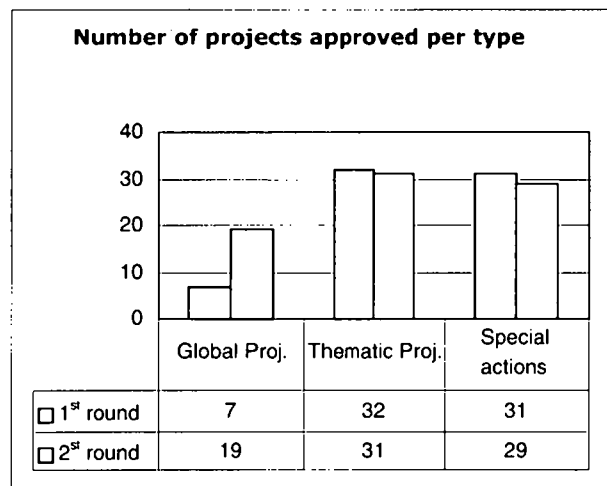
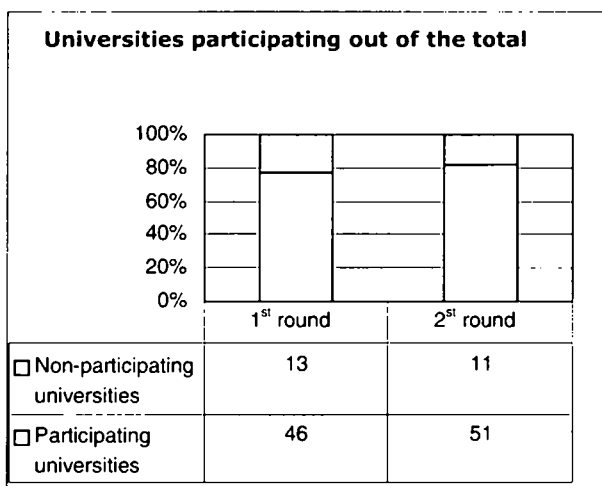
The present *summary* is a synthesis of the complete report which has been published in Spanish.

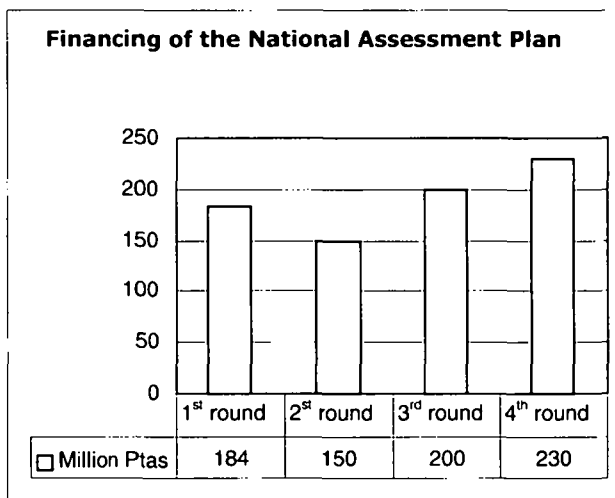
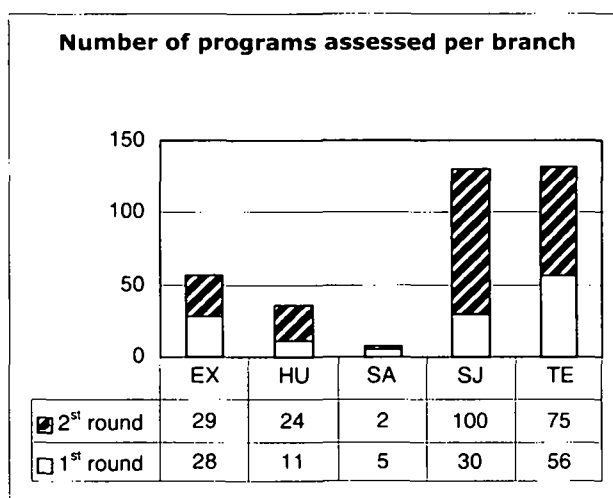
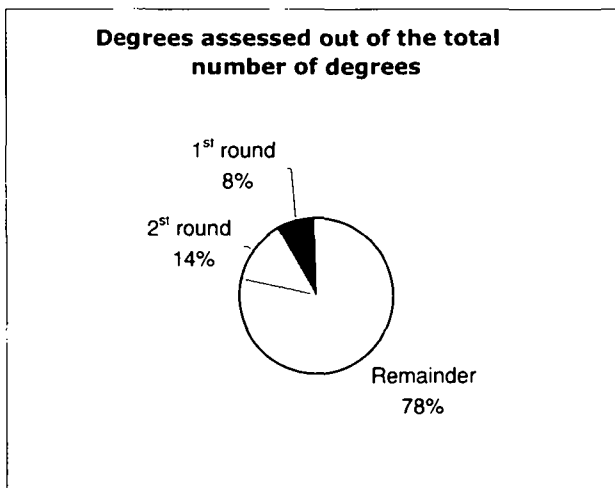
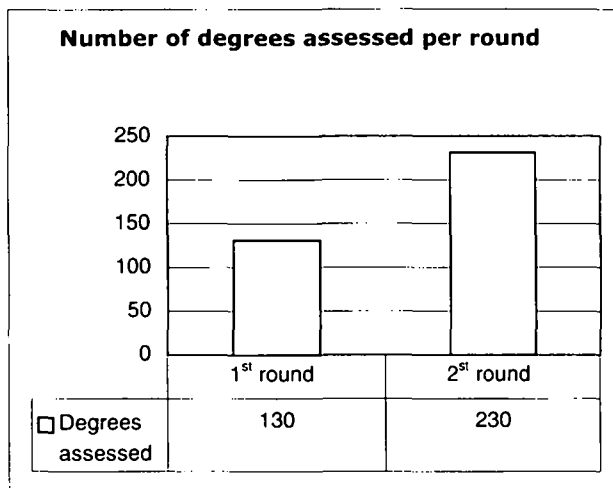
2. MAIN DATA OF THE 1998 ASSESSMENT ROUND

Fiftyone Universities presented their assessment projects for the 1998 PNECU round, that is, 82 per cent of all the universities. This figure **represents the participation of the universities almost in their entirety**, considering that some of them had been set up so recently that their participation was not recommended. Out of the 47 Public Universities, 45 (96 per cent) presented their projects: 29 in the Council of Universities, 9 in the Andalusian Agency and 7 in the Catalan Agency.. As regards the private universities, 6 of them presented their assessment projects, 4 in the Council of Universities and 2 in Catalonia.

These 51 projects presented have resulted in the assessment of 230 study programs, together with the departments and services associated with these programs. This has meant an increase of 77 per cent in the number of programs evaluated, compared to the previous exercise. As a result of the 2 rounds of assessments carried out so far, about 22 per cent of all the existing higher education programs have been assessed. In addition, research in those departments closer related to the programs and some areas of management and services have also been assessed.

In terms of specialities, the greatest number of programs assessed correspond to those belonging to Social Sciences and Law and Engineering, which have also experienced the greatest expansion over the last years. This is logical, considering that these two fields together encompass many more programs than the rest. It is important to highlight the initiative taken by the Agency for Quality in Higher Education in Catalonia to carry out transversal assessments, which consists of assessing the same program in different universities. In 1998, 5 programs have been evaluated following this method.





The costs of this second round were shared by the Ministry of Education, universities that and the regional governments that contribute with different amounts to financially support to the PNECU. The total cost is estimated to be around 3.4 Meuro. Broadly speaking, universities cover most of the expenses, the contribution of the regional governments being highly variable. For example, in Catalonia the *Generalitat* (the autonomous government of Catalonia) provides 55 per cent of the total cost.

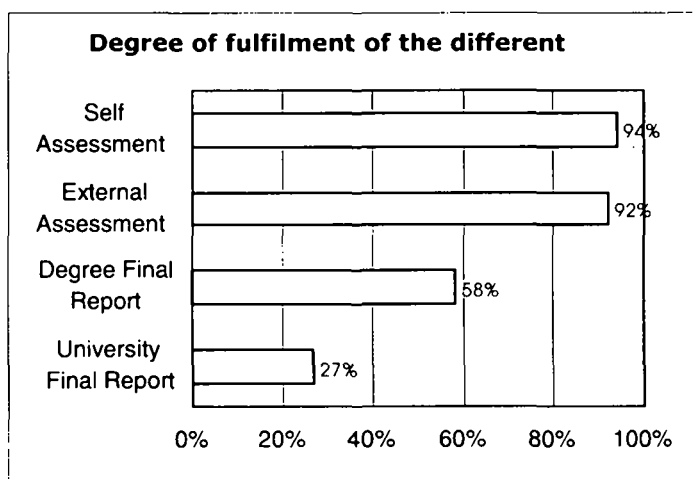
About 4 000 people have participated in the different phases of the assessment process (self-assessment and external assessment), among whom can be found students, academic staff, non-academic staff, postgraduate students, external professionals and members of different governing bodies. Around 900 people attended training sessions, including all the external evaluators and many members of the Internal Evaluation Committee.

In addition to assessment, 29 special actions were carried out. They were basically oriented to the organisation of training activities concerning assessment-related topics. The setting up of debates on methodological procedures and the improvement of quality were also emphasised. Besides, the

existing assessment material was reviewed and new material was produced in the light of that revision.

At the closing date for the submission of reports and documents –31st January 2000, the **Self-assessment and External Assessment phases had been accomplished almost entirely. However, only half of the Programs Final Reports and about a quarter of the University Final Report University had been completed**, with the exception of the Universities which took part in the process through Agency for Higher Education in Catalonia. In this case, the level of accomplishment of the completion of the final report was 100 per cent.

Given that these data were collected almost 18 months after the outset of the process, it seems reasonable to revise the necessity, usefulness and structure of the Program and University Final Reports, as well as the appropriate and desirable length of the assessment process.



3. ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS

3.1 INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT.

The continuity and extension of the participation of most institutions reveal the institutional commitment with quality assessment and improvement of the quality in higher education. In this sense, a consolidation of the technical units created in many universities in the 1996 round has been observed in the present one. The level of involvement of some institutions stands out not only for the magnitude of the assessment project but also for being carried out within the framework of an internal Institutional Quality Plan. However, due to the small number of final reports submitted by each University about its participation in the present exercise, it is difficult to draw general conclusions regarding the extent to which the objectives have been met by these institutions in the PNECU, and also to the extent to which the aims of the Plan have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, in the reports presented, it can be seen that the degree of fulfilment of the commitment made by the universities is very high.

The most common way (56 per cent) of making the decision to participate in the current round of assessment was basically an agreement reached among the governing bodies of the program once the University had forwarded the proposal. There are also cases of open sessions within a university, of initiatives taken by the institutions or centres themselves (in 4 Universities) and of decisions made directly by the governing bodies. In the latter case, a certain tendency on behalf of the committees to consider the assessment process as something external to the program has been observed. At the same time, the legitimisation of the process and the involvement of the different bodies depend not so much on the source of the decision-making but on the ulterior management of the self-assessment process.

The next table summarise the weak, strong points and the *improvement* proposal related to institutional commitment and participation in the process.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High degree of fulfilment of the commitment made by the university in their projects. • Continuity and expansion of the participation of higher education institutions in the PNECU, thus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal institutional commitment of the universities as regards the setting up and implementation of Quality Committees and Technical Units • Failure of the universities to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make it clearer to the universities the possibility of modifying the projects presented according to the different circumstances of the programs to be assessed; also to ensure formal communication with the Technical Office of the University Committee as

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<p>reflecting their commitment with the assessment and quality of these institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High involvement of some universities, shown not only by the magnitude of their assessment projects, but also by being carried out within the framework of the Institutional Quality Plan • Consolidation of technical units created in the first round. • Fulfilment of the Self-assessment and External Assessment phases in practically all the participating universities. • Encouragement of institutional reflection on teaching quality. • The agreement signed by the universities and the Catalan Agency which include the commitment of both institutions in the institutional assessment. 	<p>communicate formally to the University Committees all the modifications of the projects approved in the second assessment round.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay of some higher education institutions in the submission of the University Final Report. This makes it difficult to draw global conclusions on the extent to which the objectives of the institutions have been met and the potential consequences on the design and implementation of the improvement plans. • The current PNECU calendar and the scarcity of follow-up plans facilitate the delay of the assessment process, as the Assessment Committees tend to consider that their task has been completed once the visit of the External Assessment Committee has taken place. The interruption of the process due to summer break – immediately after the submission of the External Assessment Report - reinforces that perception, which hinders the elaboration of the Program Final 	<p>regards the various modifications and events in the development of the projects presented by the universities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the fulfilment of the submission of reports by the universities, thus reducing the current laxness. • To guarantee the impact of the assessment on the program assessed and the institution, encouraging a link between the participation in the PNECU and the undertaking of strategic planning with the setting up of quality plans which provide coherence and legitimise improvement proposals, thus guaranteeing the follow-up of the process.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
	<p>Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PNECU does not seem to have fulfilled the objective of promoting strategic reflection on research and services domains. 	

3.2 ORGANISATION OF THE PROCESS

Most of the institutions have carried out their assessment process following the analysis dimensions provided in the *Assessment Guide (Guía de Evaluación)* of the PNECU. In this analysis, priority is given to teaching over research and to both over services. The PNECU seems to have failed to meet the objective of promoting strategic reflection on the services and research areas to the same extent as they did in the teaching domain.

Most of the reports show the adequacy and usefulness of the *Assessment Guide*, mainly in teaching assessment. However, critics to the guide, especially in the assessment of research and management, are relatively common. Some Internal Evaluation Committees have questioned the adequacy of the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model, proposed in the guide, for the analysis of services units linked to programs or centres, since this model seems to be more appropriate for the analysis of complete services. However, its application to administrative services in some institutions has shown the viability of the EFQM method for that analysis. Similarly, the reiteration of the research protocol and its lack of adequacy when applied to a specific scientific field is often criticised.

The reports show the consolidation of the technical units (which can be considered a subsequent achievement of the first PNECU round). The Internal and External Evaluation Committees have valued the support obtained from these units very positively (60 per cent of the evaluations were positive) and they have suggested the creation of those units in the institutions where they did not exist before as a top priority.

One of the weakest features of the university system pointed out in the first round of assessment and reported again in the present round, is the inadequacy of the information systems existing in the universities to provide useful data for assessment and strategic decision-making. This inadequacy is especially important in relation with research and services. As regards research, this problem is reflected in the fact that 41 per cent of the data required by the tables of the *Guide* have not been presented; as for services, only 3 universities have provided all the data required by the same guide.

Next table summarise the main results on the organization of the internal process.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The viability of the PNECU self-assessment methodology for most of the assessment processes shown in the present exercise. • High compliance with the PNECU Assessment Guide by the universities which have undertaken the assessment process. Verification of its usefulness and adequacy, mainly for teaching analysis. • Flexibility of the Assessment Guide to include the various methodological adaptations and improvements carried out in different universities either individually or co-ordinated by the Agencies. • Positive evaluation by the Internal and External Evaluation Committees of the support provided by the technical units, whose functions within the university increased and diversified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambiguity of the <i>program</i> as unit of analysis of the teaching provision. Consequently, it has been suggested –as an alternative not included in the Assessment Guide - that this unit should be replaced occasionally by the <i>centre</i> –as unit of analysis- in the teaching assessment. • Failure to use the departments or the cognate area as units of research analysis. In its place, either departmental divisions or individuals have been used. • Poor adequacy of the research protocol to be applied to some scientific areas. • Difficulties in the adequacy of the EFQM model to carry out the analysis of service units linked to programs or centres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To comply with the PNECU prerequisite that there should be technical units responsible for the assessment process in the participating universities. To reinforce the institutional integration of the existing technical units. • To elaborate guiding criteria for the selection of the units (programs and services) to be assessed: internal conditions of the organisation, existence of adequate leadership in the units, favourable attitudes towards assessment and quality improvement, willingness to make the effort required. • To encourage the joint assessment of related teaching fields (per centre), allocating a specific funding module. • To make the model of the teaching process more explicit, highlighting the importance of the central dimensions (objectives, results, organisation,

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to simplify the data tables required by the Assessment Guide in all their dimensions. • The use of questionnaires as the only tool, which does not help to direct the Self-assessment towards the analysis of the teaching process, thus failing to take advantage of the expertise and integrative reflection of the Assessment Committees. Occasionally, these surveys turned out to be too complex. • The non-existence of technical units in a few of the participating universities • The inadequacy of the existing university information systems to provide useful data for the assessment and the strategic-decision making. 	<p>performance) in teaching and research provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop, by consensus, a useful, valid and reliable system of indicators of the different university performances. • To improve the availability and access to the statistical information. For that purpose, the organisational integration of the systems providing that information in the institutional assessment processes should be improved. Likewise, the information on research activity provided by more systematic sources should be integrated, for the time being, with that of the university information systems (for example, aggregated data from the R+D National and Regional Plans). • To improve the Assessment Guide to make it more user-friendly. To make the analysis models of the teaching and research processes more explicit. To give clear guidelines about the relative importance of the different dimensions of the

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
		<p>analysis (emphasising the greater relative weight of central dimensions such as objectives, results, organisation, performance). To require systematically the formulation of conclusions (strong and weak points and improvement proposals) in all the dimensions of the analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the demand of an integrative analysis, in the different reports, to balance the importance given to the research and management analysis against teaching. This objective aims not only to provide the necessary data, but also to encourage the strategic debate on research teams and approaches. On the other hand, the training and the analysis capacity of the Assessment Committees regarding management and service domains could be developed (considering the possibility of a greater participation of the management bodies in the process). • To make it more explicit that it is necessary and advisable to apply the research protocol

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
		<p>within the framework of the cognate area assessed, emphasising the flexibility of the protocol in terms of the plurality of the results of the research carried out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the background training of all those taking part in the process: assessment offices, members of the Self-assessment Committees, etc.

3.3 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

3.3.1 *The self-assessment process.*

When constituting **the Internal Evaluation Committees, representatives of academic authorities and academic staff of the programs assessed were included.** Failing to follow the recommendations provided in the *Assessment Guide*, **there was lack of students in 5 universities, of non-academic staff in 3 of them, and of academic staff (only represented by academic bodies) in one university.** These absences increase the risk of self-complacency in those responsible for the teaching process when undertaking their own self-assessment (which has been criticised by the External Evaluation Committees).

It has been observed that, in the assessment conclusions (in weak and strong points and in proposals for improvement), little attention is paid to central dimensions of the analysis of teaching provision (such as Aims and Objectives, Training Programmes, Development and Results) and of research (such as Objectives, Structure, Results and Output). For example, Self-studies discussing either the syllabuses of the different subjects or how they match with the objectives of the study programmes and with the teaching activities are rather unusual, as are those which discuss the evolution of the activity or the results of different approaches to research.

In order to carry out their work, the Internal Evaluation Committees have constituted sub-committees in charge of developing the sections corresponding to teaching provision, research and/or management to be included in the Self-study (in fact, 89 per cent of those reports include that kind of information). The organisation of independent committees in charge of teaching (by programs) and research (by departments) seems to have facilitated their task and have made it easier. However, according to the reports on the program, this subdivision has not improved essentially the depth of the analysis of each function and has not made the integration between them possible.

The training sessions organised by the PNECU constitute an extremely important introductory element for the assessment process. They seem to be highly efficient for that function, as most Internal Evaluation Committees have evaluated positively the usefulness of the training provided by the PNECU. However, some difficulties in conceptualising and evaluating the processes of teaching, research and management have been observed.

A number of universities have paid special attention to participation and information activities (brochures, posters, meetings, internet) during the self-assessment process. It is important to highlight, in this context, the initiative taken by some institutions to distribute the self-assessment reports among the appropriate social and professional organisations.

It is difficult to achieve an effective involvement in the assessment process of people in the programs. In many cases, the initial reticence seems to be associated to the excessive workload and to certain scepticism about the usefulness of the whole process. In these cases, the institutional messages do not seem to have conveyed the importance of the process effectively. In general, when the usefulness of the assessment was perceived, this reticence weakened, at least for the unit assessed. In some cases, the internal motivation necessary for the continuation of quality assessment in plans for improvement was generated.

The self-assessment process has been useful for a rather exhaustive analysis of teaching and research in the programs assessed. First of all, the analysis of the Self-studies allows us to verify that the **Assessment Guide seems to be a useful tool for the assessment of teaching**: about 79 per cent of the issues raised were covered one way or another, and about 59 per cent were evaluated in the Self-studies. The Context and Results sections were extensively described by the Self-assessment Committees, while the Human Resources and Commentaries sections were described in less detail. **Likewise, the Assessment Guide seems to promote an analysis systematically based on evidence**, since 64 per cent of the descriptions and 53 per cent of the evaluations made are clearly founded on evidence (not so much in the treatment of the Development of Teaching Provision and Human Resources sections as in the discussion of the Program Context and Teaching Results sections).

The follow-up of the *Assessment Guide* is similar in the research assessment: about 78 per cent of the issues raised have been covered and about 63 per cent were evaluated by the Internal Evaluation Committees. The Resource dimension is dealt with extensively, to the detriment of the Objectives and Structure sections. However, **when carrying out a deep analysis of the research dimension, the *Assessment Guide* seems to be of less help**, as only 58 per cent of the descriptions and 46 per cent of the evaluations made seem to be clearly founded on evidence.

Most of the reports have identified the strong and weak points of the different dimensions analysed. The teaching provision analysis tends to be more exhaustive, in line with the centrality given to that function in the assessment of many programs: about 28 per cent of the issues put forward for teaching provision and about 24 per cent of those put forward for research have given rise to the identification of weak and strong points.

The proposals for improvement of the Self-studies concentrate, to some extent, on facilities and resources in both functions (23 per cent in Teaching and 45 per cent in Research) to the detriment of other dimensions described and evaluated such as Teaching Development (9 per cent) and Results (where only 3 per cent of the subjects have given rise to some proposals). The reliability of the analysis carried out by the Internal Evaluation Committees is reflected both in that coherence and in the balanced increment of the proposals: 36 per cent of them consisted of making decisions on reorganisation or internal redistribution of the resources available and of making an effort which would be assumed by the departments or centres, whereas 21 per cent of the proposals required additional resources, either external or from the institution. Consequently, there is a tendency in the proposals towards an increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution.

Few reports have attempted to integrate the analysis of the different dimensions of teaching, research and management, and none of them have achieved a satisfactory integration between those functions. The analysis of the Self-studies shows that only 38 per cent of the programs assessed made a real effort of integration between the different dimensions of teaching, and only barely 18 per cent made it in research or services, whereas only 20 per cent tackle the integration between functions (the integration is relevant only in 7 universities).

Most of the reports coincide in highlighting the usefulness of the institutional assessment process in order to clarify the strategic objectives of the units assessed, to know how it functions more systematically and to tackle the design of actions for improvement (85 per cent of the Self-studies having discussed that question evaluate the process very positively). In those reports, which do not do that, it is usually argued that the assessment process has involved excessive workload only to show problems that were already known. The impact on the entire institution seems to be less certain, given the uncertainty concerning the institutional use of the results to recognise quality and to

promote improvement. Only a few quality plans have been developed which provide coherence and legitimise the proposals for improvement stemming from the participation in the PNECU and which guarantee their continuity (thus emphasising the sense of usefulness of the evaluative effort made in the unit.

In summary:

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time spent and the effort made by the members of the Self-assessment Committee. • The contribution made by the assessment to the strategic reflection of the participating programs and universities. The process appears to be useful to clarify the objectives of the units assessed, to learn about its functioning in a more systematic way and to tackle the design of improvement actions. • The process followed has helped to increase the internal motivation and to give continuity to the assessment through the improvement plans. Other important factors have been the voluntary character of the degree participation and in some cases, the overcoming of some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to weigh up and to sort out the different dimensions included in the Assessment Guide, with the aim of guiding the analysis itself. • Poor attention paid to the central dimensions of teaching (such as Aims and Objectives, Training Programme, Development and Results) and research analysis (such as Objectives, Structure, Results and Output) in the assessment conclusions (strong and weak points and improvement proposals). • The substitution of the responsibility of the Program Committee in the assessment by the importance conferred to the technical unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To suggest the organisation in sub-committees or groups linked, rather than independent committees, to carry out the teaching, research and services assessment of the programs. • To emphasise the offering of permanent guidance and of materials promoting autonomous learning, which could help the Assessment Committees to make decisions and to develop criteria for analysis.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<p>reticence to participate in the assessment, once its usefulness for the unit assessed had been shown during the process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The efficiency of the training sessions and the positive evaluation of their usefulness by the Assessment Committees. Likewise, the positive contribution of numerous information activities (brochures, posters, dissemination on the web, meetings), as well as consultation and circulation activities for the university community and for its involvement in the assessment process. • The stronger tendency of the Assessment Committee towards a reflection based on data. • The exhaustive and deep treatment of the research and teaching analysis of the programs assessed, together with the high level of coherence of the 	<p>technical unit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tendency of some Committees to perceive the assessment as a process external to the program, mainly in those cases in which the decision to participate had not been completely assumed by the committees. • Absence of some groups involved in the program from the Assessment Committees. • Poorly effective involvement of student representatives in the assessment process. • Partial participation of the Assessment Committees in the training sessions. • Difficulties of the Assessment Committees to conceptualise and evaluate teaching, research and management processes, which can indicate insufficient training. 	

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<p>conclusions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase in the improvement proposals aimed at enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of the units assessed, through the reorganisation of the resources available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty to present improvement proposals in operative terms and to set up follow-up mechanisms for the different actions. • Difficulty to carry out integrative analysis of the teaching, research and services dimensions. • Difficulty to reflect the diversity of opinions and feelings in the units assessed. • Uncertainty in terms of the impact that the whole process might have in the entire institution, mainly in those cases in which there are no quality plans which give coherence and legitimise the improvement proposals resulting from the participation in the PNECU, which guarantee their follow-up (thus, reinforcing the feeling of usefulness of the evaluative effort made in the units). Broadly speaking, 	

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
	<p>there is scepticism as regards the usefulness of the process for the university community of the programs assessed.</p>	

3.3.2 The External Evaluation Process

It has been pointed out that the External Evaluation Committees did not have enough methodological training. This lack can be seen in the general dependence they had on the Self-assessment Reports, since the methodological bias observed in these reports is often repeated - having been scarcely corrected - in the External Evaluation reports.

The current PNECU calendar and the scarcity of follow-up plans lead to some delay in the assessment process, since the Internal Evaluation Committees tend to consider their function to be completed once the External Evaluation Committees visit has taken place.

Likewise, it is necessary to guarantee the understanding of the external assessment role as a contrast and complement of the Self-assessment process, emphasising its function to encourage and sanction that process.

The visits to the assessed unit were one of the strengths of the external assessment process, judging by the number of times that their usefulness is mentioned and by the good atmosphere established between the External Evaluation Committees and the units visited. The weak point of these visits was the irregular participation of attendants to the public audiences.

The lack of information and distribution of the assessment process, verified in many of the External Committees reports, is another weak point. This results in many of the members summoned to the audiences being unfamiliar with the previous assessment work carried out by their units; it also leads to a low participation of the audiences, mainly public audiences.

The visiting programmes were kept and were considered to be sufficient in the overall external assessment process. When needed, the External Evaluation Committees were flexible enough to adjust their timetable to the real needs of their visits.

No significant imbalance has been found in the membership composition of the External Evaluation Committees, appointed by the Technical Committee or by the Andalusia and Catalonia Agencies. However, the efficiency of the membership could be improved by previously collecting the opinion of the different universities about the most appropriate structure of External Evaluation Committees.

Certain delay in the drawing up and submission of the External Evaluation Reports has been noted. One important weak point of the whole process is the lack of mechanisms to act against the failure of the External Evaluation Committees to submit the required reports.

Few weak and strong points have been pointed out in the areas of research, services and management, which it reinforces the idea of the methodological difficulties affecting the procedure and the use of tools. In the case of management, this could be aggravated by the fact that many members of the External Evaluation Committees did not have enough experience in university management to be able to analyse this dimension efficiently.

The distribution of the weak points and their methodological bias coincides point per point with what was detailed in the strong areas. However, in the whole process, a general tendency towards recognising a greater number of weaknesses over strengths has been observed.

The Proposals for Improvement show the same distribution as that observed in the strengths and weaknesses, which is logical since the External Assessment Reports show coherence between the improvement proposals and their diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses.

The bias noted towards teaching is strongly marked here, as 90 per cent of the improvement proposals forwarded in the External Assessments Reports refer to this dimension. However, the fact that at least 42 per cent of the improvement proposals in all the reports were also supported by the external evaluators shows the usefulness of the external assessment.

3.3.3 External Assessment

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usefulness and efficacy of the visits to the units assessed. High fulfilment of the calendar and the visiting program. Adequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor information on the functioning of the External Assessment Committees, although sufficient internal consensus is found. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the training and selection systems of the External Assessment Committees, mainly by means of complementary material and technical

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<p>infrastructure to carry out this phase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced composition of the External Assessment Committees, especially when they are made up of four members. • Adequacy of technical guidelines provided in the Assessment for the External Assessment. • Assumption by the External Assessment Committees of their clear function to support the assessed units rather than having a controlling attitude, which has led to the expansion of the quality and improvement culture. • Adequate analysis of the management and development sections of the teaching processes. • A great number of valued judgements made and improvement proposals forwarded, both 	<p>found.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor methodological training of the External Assessment Committees. • Deficiencies in the information and dissemination systems of the External Assessment Process. • Deficiencies in the systems used to select the audiences, which may have affected the irregular attendance and participation of the audiences found during the visits (mainly undergraduates and postgraduates). • Poor analysis of the Design and Results sections of teaching. Failure to develop the research and management dimensions. Some bias towards self-complacency in the analysis of research provision versus the teaching provision. 	<p>guidance and advise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the information and dissemination systems of the assessment process. • To improve the visiting calendar for External Assessment, avoiding the end lecturing periods. • To implement a system to follow up the fulfilment of the deadlines set for the External Assessment Report. • To improve the external assessment model for research. • To include experts in university management in the External Assessment Committees. • To establish a procedure to assess the performance and results of the External Evaluators.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
bearing a high level of coherence with diagnosis of strong and weak points.		

3.3.4 The Final Program Report

Twenty-three universities submitted their Final Program Report on the assessed programs and, in all of them, **explicit proposals for improvement can be found**. Consequently, there has been a marked increase in the diagnosis and actions for improvement suggested in the self-assessment and external assessment phases, in which a strong coherence between strengths, weaknesses and proposals for improvement can be found. A strong aspect of the whole assessment process is how all the Final Program Reports tend to establish a range of actions for improvement, (such as setting priorities, fixing deadlines, implementing facilities, determining responsibilities, etc.) although in some cases they should be stated more explicitly. However, the fundamental phase of the Final Program Report consists of establishing an action plan for improvement, and for that purpose, only those actions suggested in the self-assessment and the external assessment are considered –except when there is clear contradiction. Unfortunately, these improvement proposals lack a well-defined, follow-up scheduled plan.

It is not clear how the Self-studies and the External Evaluation Reports have been contrasted, or how the relative importance given to the self-assessment and to the external assessment has been determined.

In the few cases in which the University Final Report has been submitted, it has been found that: a) there is a remarkable improvement in the concretion and operativity of the previous phases of the assessment process and b) an explicit institutional commitment to improvement has been reached.

There is some delay in meeting the submission deadlines for the final reports. It is necessary to determine the reasons for those delays, in order to adjust the calendar to the necessary requirements, so that the universities can submit their final reports. In case of unjustified failure to do that, some mechanisms should be established to enforce the deadlines for the final reports (for example, establishing a link between funding provision and meeting the deadline set for report submission).

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight increase in the Program Final Reports compared to the previous exercise, as a synthesis of the Self-assessment and the external assessment process. • Great coherence between weak points, strong points and improvement proposals. • Integration, in general, of the previous assessment phases (Self-Assessment Report and External Assessment Report). • Adequacy of the guidelines provided in the Assessment to draw up and make out the reports. • Marked improvement in the diagnosis and proposals for improvement of the previous phases. • Clear and explicit institutional commitment to present Quality Plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient description of the assessment process and its different phases followed by the university, mainly the extent to which the agents involved in the Self-assessment and the External Assessment have made use of the consulting resources available. • Scarcely critical and poorly descriptive evaluation of the Self-assessment and External Assessment processes included in the Program Final Report. • Improvement proposals lacking concretion and technical operativity. Generalised lack of follow-up plans and improvement actions • Generalised absence of the Final Reports on the University and methodological disorientation in 3 universities, which mix the Program Final Reports with the University Final Reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To suggest more operative improvement proposals, which technically indicate priorities, deadlines, resources necessary to implement them and agents responsible for carrying them on. • To provide in the Assessment Guide, a detailed methodology of the contrasting process of the Self-assessment Report and the External Assessment Report. • To indicate in the Assessment Guide the need to include a detailed account of the assessment process with its different phases followed by each university. • To develop in the Assessment Guide guidelines for the analytical and systematic contrast between the Self-assessment and external assessment phases. • To include follow-up structured plans in the Program Final Reports. • To adjust the calendar of assessment scheduled to increase the submission of University Final Reports within the deadlines set or to include mechanisms to enforce the fulfilment of deadlines.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT OF THE EVALUATION

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING

4.1.1 *Institutional Context*

The analysis of the Institutional Context constitutes the base for a viable and adequate planning which takes into consideration the real situation of the institution as well as its social and economic relevance. However, the participating programs have not carried out this analysis properly, tackling it very superficially and not very exhaustively. Except for a few cases, not enough elements –either quantitative or qualitative- have been provided in order to undertake the authentic planning of the unit. Therefore, it has been observed that most of the analysis and evaluations carried out by the Committees refer to the internal context of the University. The analysis on the external situation –the social, cultural, economic and labour context- are very sporadic and/or rather superficial. To some extent, **the lack of a pro-active culture promoting the social and economic relevance of the programs is reflected here.**

The section that includes the greatest number of comments, evaluations and proposals for improvement is that concerning the relationships between the centre and the departments with management responsibility for the program assessed. It is often the case that the units assessed **reveal that the interests of the program are not adequately defended by the institutional governing body. Likewise, there are plenty of references to co-ordination problems between the departments and the centre and to the lack of clarity as regards the assignment of functions and responsibilities within the departments.**

On the other hand, plenty of attention has been paid by the Assessment Committees to the leadership of the governing bodies and their management style. Overall, their evaluation is not negative, however, plenty of proposals have been presented which refer to the need to improve communication channels, openness, involvement and monitoring of the meetings of the collegiate bodies.

Finally, in some cases the units assessed feel that they have been marginalised and that lack political influence in the decisions made by the top governing bodies of the university. This fact reveals the need to promote organisation cohesion in some universities through specific policies concerning this aspect.

<i>Strong points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In those universities in which an important leadership in the governing bodies has been observed, this has been evaluated very positively. • In those universities with global quality or assessment plans under way, the units assessed see this as a positive element which favours their interests and efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participating programs have not developed this analysis adequately, tackling it superficially and not exhaustively. With a few exceptions, not enough quantitative or qualitative elements have been provided to develop an authentic planning of the unit. The absence of a proactive management culture searching for social and economic relevance and focusing its analysis both in the internal and external context has been observed. • There are co-ordination problems between the centre and the departments and poor definition of roles and responsibilities. • The units assessed feel that they have been marginalised and that they lack political influence in the decisions made by the top governing bodies of the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve organisation cohesion in some universities through specific policies. To clarify the functions and responsibilities of collegiate, uni-personal bodies which manage the programs and departments, in order to overcome some interference found. • To write up procedure manuals which systematise and facilitate the administrative and decision-making processes.

4.1.2 *Aims, Objectives and Planning*

In this section, it is important to highlight the first and most important evidence, which is **an almost total failure to formulate the aims and objectives of the programs assessed adequately and properly**. This fact reveals that our universities have not undertaken planning processes leading to a precise and operative identification of the aims and objectives of each of their units. Nevertheless, it can be said that the assessment process has allowed the participating programs to become aware of this failure and, in some cases, to introduce the formulation of their aims and objectives as one of their top priorities.

On the other hand, most of the participating programs are rather satisfied with the considerable demand of their studies and with the high motivation and intake calibre of their students. However, it has been noted that there is an important but minority group of units which observe with great concern a decrease in their demand and consequently a weaker preparation and smaller motivation in the intake of students.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasise an almost **total lack of systematic studies on graduate employability and on their demand in the labour market**. It is extremely significant that all the participating programs lack reliable data on the professional success of their graduates and on the professional profile required by the job market.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the participating programs feel satisfied with the existing demand in their studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather generalised absence of an adequate and proper formulation of aims and objectives in the programs assessed. • Lack of reliable information on the employability of graduates and on the professional profile required by the job market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To suggest the adequate formulation of aims and objectives in the programs. • To carry out systematic studies on graduate employability and on the demands of the job market.

4.1.3 Curriculum Design

Broadly speaking, it can be said that the units evaluated have gone to a great deal of effort to reflect on their Curriculum. Consequently, it has been observed that the Assessment Committees are fully aware of the great importance of any aspect concerning design and layout of the curriculum - if quality is to be offered.

Regarding the general layout and design of the Study Programmes, the Assessment Committees evaluate some aspects very positively, such as the range of optional courses, the existence of practicals and the possibility offered by the new Curricula of choosing various curriculum routes. Despite this positive evaluation, the units assessed perceive scope for improvement, suggesting actions aimed at solving some important deficiencies found in their programmes of studies in order to develop the objectives stated in the Reform adequately. **The three areas for improvement often mentioned are: increase and improvement of optional courses, quantitative and qualitative improvement of practicals and a decrease in the total number of lecturing sessions that students have to deal with.**

The characteristics, relevance and dimension of the **syllabuses** is one of the aspects the Assessment Committees have reflected on in more depth. Their evaluation is in general positive, highlighting the advances achieved since the introduction of the new curriculum.

However, very often the units assessed have noted some inconsistencies in the subject syllabuses. Reflection on this question suggests inadequate and insufficient coordination and collaboration among all the parts involved. In fact, it has been found that, in many cases, the existing situation concerning the coordination of the departments taking part in the Program can be improved considerably. This failure in coordination can also be found among the lecturers of the same department sharing teaching responsibilities in the program. This lack of coordination gives way to important deficiencies in the content of the syllabuses, such as: unsuitable objectives, content overlapping, important gaps, inappropriate sequencing, lack of correspondence between the number of subject credits awarded and the workload, inadequate updating and/or lack of content revision process, etc.

The implementation of the practical dimension of the curriculum is another central issue in the analysis and reflections made up by the Assessment Committees. A balanced evaluation of this aspect is observed, finding a certain degree of satisfaction due to the success achieved, but at the same time important areas for improvement are suggested. These improvements focus on the developments of what is called the "*Practicum*" (industrial placements). The recent incorporation of this form of teaching in the programs has meant an important challenge for universities. This fact can explain some of the deficiencies found in certain cases. Among the improvement proposals suggested are those that refer to tutorials and the follow-up of students'

progress, quantitative and qualitative enhancement of the relations with companies and institutions offering work placements.

Finally, it must be highlighted that, as far as the **Academic Guides were concerned, -which cover adequately the syllabuses of all the subjects that make up a program-** a very positive evaluation was made. These documents are a very important element, since they reflect the adequate planning of activities as well as the attention paid to the information needs of the students.

In very few occasions have the units assessed pinpointed the absence of the Academic Guide mentioned. There has been an increasing number of evaluations reporting an insufficient elaboration of the syllabuses included in the Guide, suggesting that, apart from the contents and the bibliography, the objectives, methodology and evaluation system should be included.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Curricula in which the range of optional courses and the possibility to choose various curriculum routes has been evaluated positively. • Certain satisfaction due to the growth in the practical dimension of the curriculum. • The existence of Academic Guides which include all the syllabuses of the subjects that make up a program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some delay in the setting up of the new curricula in some cases. • Lack of co-ordination in the contents of the subject syllabuses, such as: inadequacy with the objectives; content overlapping, important gaps and inappropriate sequencing, lack of correspondence between the number of subject credits awarded and the course workload, inadequate updating and/or lack of revision process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative improvement of the practical dimension. • Decrease in the total number of lecturing sessions that students have to deal with. • Development of the so-called "<i>Practicum</i>" Improvement of tutorials and follow-up of students' progress as well as encouraging of the relations with companies and institutions offering industrial placements. • Improvement of the Academic Guide, so that the objectives, methodology and evaluation system are included in the syllabus, together with the contents and bibliography.

4.1.4 *Teaching Development*

In spite of all the efforts made to standardise and disseminate the use of tutorials existing in some of the programs assessed, **students hardly ever make an appropriate use of them**, concentrating their use only in those days previous to or during the exam periods rather than throughout the course.

All the measures suggested are aimed at improving the use and efficiency of tutorials throughout their course of studies. In some cases, a more personalised approach has been adopted, creating the figure of one tutor per student while they remain at the university.

There is a **latent concern to set up innovative teaching experiences** using audiovisuals, multimedia resources, etc., given that lecturing is still the most common teaching method used. This creates a certain degree of dissatisfaction, mainly among the students, as can be seen in some of the reports on the different programs evaluated. The reasons for this are diverse, among which are: lack of training activities and pedagogical advice aimed at the higher education lecturing staff; inadequacy of teaching facilities and resources. In that sense, a decrease in the size of the groups would mean a good opportunity to set up innovative teaching strategies.

The extent of accomplishment of the development of the subject programs is practically complete in the programs assessed.

There is an **adequate offer as regards complementary courses and training activities**. However, the students find it difficult to attend them due to the excessive workload they have to deal with.

There is a real **concern to encourage liaison with companies and institutions** in order to promote student work placements. The European dimension of the program is very important, as can be seen in the agreements reached with several foreign public and private institutions and with different foreign universities.

It is not very well known what the real workload that each subject is or what demands are made on the students, but it seems clear that **the total number of lecturing hours is very high and that the course workload of the students is not properly planned**. In some reports, problems such as the students' inadequate study skills, the previously mentioned high number of lecturing hours and excessive workload have been observed.

As regards the level of **difficulty of the studies**, the reports show differences between the opinions of the lecturing staff and those of the students. The level of difficulty is deemed to be higher by the students, not only because of the demands made but also because of the amount of time that the students have to spend on their training, which is measured by the number of hours spent attending classes and studying.

In most of the programs evaluated, **the assessment mechanisms and criteria** are formulated and approved by the governing bodies of the different faculties and centres. They are also published in the corresponding teaching guides and in other dissemination media. In some reports it has also been observed that the assessment system has its own mechanisms to guarantee transparency and observation of students rights throughout the process. The assessment criteria are established, released and distributed. Likewise, an adequate planning, dissemination and observation of the exam schedules has been reported.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The setting up of innovative teaching experiences by means of multimedia resources, audio-visuals techniques, etc. • Incipient development of a personalised tutorial system oriented towards academic and extra-academic topics which are not included in the present tutorials. Tutorial activities closely linked to the Final-Year Project, or to the <i>Practicum</i>. • The high level of accomplishment of the development of subject syllabuses. • The increase in agreements with companies and institutions to promote industrial placements for students. • The definition of the assessment mechanisms and criteria, approved by the governing bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccurate knowledge of the workload that each subject entails and of the demand made on the students. In any case, a clearly high workload for the students. • The difficulties found in the setting up of new teaching methodologies. In some cases, it is the size of the groups, which hinders the setting up of some methodological innovative systems. • Poor and inadequate use of tutorials by the students, concentrating their use mainly in those days previous to or during the exams, rather than throughout the academic year. • Deficient training of students in study skills, learning strategies, attitudes, job search, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase the use and efficiency of tutorials and guidance throughout the whole course of studies, incorporating a more active, personalised approach. Special emphasis should be given to orientation in the first years at the university and in their incorporation into the job market. • To encourage the use of new teaching methodologies through specific programmes on innovative teaching.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<p>of the different faculties and schools and published in the corresponding teaching guides and/or other mechanisms for distribution. The planning, dissemination and observation of the exam schedules.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growth of the European dimension in the programme. • The offering of complementary courses and development activities for undergraduates. 		

4.1.5 Teaching Results

Although not all the reports offer data or evaluations on the students achievements, the data available on teaching results show a trend towards a poor **success rate** (percentage of students passing their exam over the total number of students sitting the exam), a **poor achievement rate** (percentage of students passing their exam over the total number of students registered) and a **high drop-out rate**, mainly in the first year.

In many of the programs evaluated, there is a notable coincidence as regards the low number of students sitting their exams in their first year and the high number of drop-outs, which should lead to the design and implementation of improvement measures. However, these results vary considerably depending on the programs or specific areas.

In a number of the programs assessed, it has been observed that **few students finish their studies within the time scheduled in the core program**, which reveals the low academic achievement at all levels. This low achievement is one of the weakest points of the system. This high rate of delay brings about a

higher average study time. It is important to indicate that there is a great concern to find solutions to palliate this high level of academic failure.

Despite the fact that there is no follow-up of the graduates, the final result of teaching thereby being unknown, there is evidence that **they consider that the training received is a key element to their future employment and emphasise the usefulness of the instruction received.** In some universities, the creation of a data gathering system has been suggested (questionnaires for graduates, enterprises, etc.) so that some feedback on them can be obtained.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significant advance that has taken place in many universities as regards the gathering and analysis of data on the academic results. • The opinion of graduates, who consider the training, received at the university a key element for their future employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low rate of students passing their exams over the total number of students sitting them and poor achievement rate (students passing their exam over the total number of students registered). • Low rate of students sitting their exams in the first year and a high rate of dropouts in the same period of time. • Low rate of students who complete their studies in the time scheduled in the curriculum. • Poor follow-up of graduates and lack of data on graduate employability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find out the reasons for the high dropout rates and the low achievement rates of the students, mainly in the first year. To increase the different success rates. To establish reactive mechanisms for the departments to deal with the negative results obtained by the students in some subjects or programs. • To carry out studies on the characteristics of the job market, employment and graduate demand. To design a system to collect information (questionnaires, etc.) so that some feedback on them can be obtained. • To establish strategies to emphasise and encourage those activities concerning graduate employability. To set up actions to facilitate contacts between companies and graduates.

4.1.6 Students

The units evaluated have made a **considerable effort to improve the quality of the information that the students receive** both in the stages prior to entering the University –by organising open days, orientation seminars for secondary students, publishing reports directed to this group- and as undergraduates. The quality of the information received by the students is notable, although the scarcity of the information addressed to students with greater academic difficulties is considered to be a weak point.

As regards the different levels of participation and representation, the presence of the students in the different governing bodies is regulated in the statutes and they are correctly informed about their rights. However, in practice, the **student participation in the election of their representatives is very low**. This is a constant that keeps coming up in most of the programs assessed. **The students' participation in the clubs, in the activities organised by the centres and in the classes is also very low**. Likewise, in the final years of their studies an increasing lack of participation is observed. It has been noted that the student involvement is greater when they have to fill in the questionnaires for the yearly evaluation of the teaching staff, the results of which are published.

With respect to career advice, **the academic and professional guidance is considered to be inadequate**, so the need for improvement is clear. Some suggestions are given to organise activities in the centres to assist the students in their curricular choices, in their search for jobs or to guide them in their specialisation , providing the necessaries facilities and tools to help them from the early stages of their studies. Notwithstanding, some important efforts have been made by some universities to organise orientation seminars on the professional activities of graduates, and also to set up certain services for them, such as working grants, advisory services etc.

Weak Points	Strong Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The increase in the information provided to the students before and after entering the university. • The incorporation of new technologies as an alternative way to provide guidance and information to the students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information and guidance addressed to students, mainly those with greater academic difficulties. • Poor participation of the students in the election of their representatives, in their associations and in the activities organised by the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform the incoming students about the background knowledge and skills required by the different programs. • To find mechanisms that increase the participation and motivation of the students in the classroom. • To organise activities that provide guidance to students in their

	<p>centres, mainly over the last years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low participation of students in the classes. • Poor academic and professional guidance aimed at students in their last year. • Lack of correspondence between the level of knowledge required when starting the first year at the university and that acquired after completion of secondary education. 	<p>curriculum route choice and in their search for employment; to advise the students about professional specialisation, creating the necessary ways and tools.</p>
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4.1.7 Human Resources

The opinion on the academic staff of the programs assessed is in general high. A distinctive feature is the matching of the lecturer profile with the objectives of the programmes, emphasising their good academic preparation and the high interest they have in teaching. This interest results in an **increasing concern on courses for staff training and development**, closely tied to the quality of teaching. Despite this concern, there is a lack of courses on teaching method, innovative and development programmes, education support services and clear guidelines for teaching development. The need for lecturing development is more urgent in those cases of new academic staff who have just joined the university. Consequently, **it is suggested that some course programmes should be designed for teaching and innovative development**, not only for new members but also for the existing permanent ones. These courses are considered an essential resource to improve the quality of the universities.

The weak point most often mentioned –by over half of the institutions- is the inadequacy of the staff organisation in the programs assessed. It has been observed that, in some institutions, **the number of PhDs is not enough and that the rate of temporary lecturers is very high. Similarly, the planning of staff provision has been generally found to be inadequate as has been the standard policy regulating the promotion of lecturers.** Consequently, **further attention needs to be given to the consolidation of lecturing staff and to the increase in the number of PhDs** in some institutions.

A general **low rate of acceptance of the yearly teaching assessment process has been observed**. Only in a few cases a positive evaluation of the teaching assessment was noted, and it coincided with those institutions in which both the system used and the influence it had on the quality of teaching had been granted a positive evaluation by the External Assessors.

Another weak point as regards the academic staff and the management of the teaching activity is **the lack of mechanisms to follow-up on their absenteeism and consequent substitutions**.

A significant feature often mentioned by the institutions assessed is **the positive evaluation of the work done by the Administrative and Technical Staff in the academic programmes and other services**. However, it has been reported that the **size of the Administrative and Technical Staff is insufficient** in many of the programs assessed, and consequently, the needs of the institutions are not met.

It has also been noted that there is a **shortage of proposals and guidelines for PAS development** in most universities and **acknowledgement of the activities by means of incentives and resources for quality improvement** has been suggested.

The timetable is evaluated negatively in most institutions, mainly because the lack of evening timetable, the needs of the programs thereby not being fulfilled. A greater flexibility and adjustment to the needs of the institutions have been suggested.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadly speaking, the training development of the academic staff matches with the objectives of the program assessed, emphasizing their extensive preparation and their high interest and motivation in teaching. • Good use of the quality potential of the teaching staff in some programs assessed, according to the academic profile of the teaching staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequacy of the current yearly teaching assessment process. • Lack of adequacy of the current staff structure in the programs assessed • Lack of teacher training programmes, of innovative and development teaching programmes and absence of guidelines for training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop programmes for teacher training and for innovative development, directed mainly to new academic staff. • To consolidate the stability of the staff in those cases with a high rate of non-permanent lecturing staff and to increase the number of Doctors in those programs with a low number of them. • To improve the assessment procedures of the teaching activity.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<p>teaching staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incipient interest in teaching development shown by certain groups of the academic staff. • Positive evaluation of the services provided by the PAS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient provision of administrative and technical staff and lack of adequacy to the needs for technical support that the units assessed have. • Shortage of proposals and guidelines for the PAS development. • Inadequacy of the PAS timetable to the needs of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To match the PAS staff to the specific needs of the units. • To develop PAS training programmes. • To assess and acknowledge PAS activities by means of different incentives.

4.1.8 Facilities and Resources

The most outstanding feature here is that **there are considerable differences among the institutions and units evaluated as regards the resources available.**

Facilities are a weak point highlighted in most of the units evaluated. In some cases, the existence of inadequate buildings and the lack of rooms to accommodate the academic needs are reported; there is also a lack of **technological resources and computing facilities.** However, some units have been very well assessed in this aspect, and a considerable increase in the resources available has been reported in general over the last years.

The library is rated as a weak feature by a third of the universities, highlighting in first place lack of capacity, followed by a shortage of reference books and insufficient equipment. However, the situation varies considerably across universities and even within the same university.

Lack or inadequacy of safety measures has also been noted, mainly in laboratories.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in computing facilities and technological resources, although these are still insufficient. • Considerable improvement in infrastructure, staff and management provision for the libraries of some universities. • Increase in specific resources for teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of safety measures, mainly in the laboratories. • Insufficient computing facilities available for the students, in spite of the effort made. • Insufficient library services in general, mainly with reference books and equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve access to computing resources for teaching and research. • As far as libraries are concerned, to increase the space available and to make them more functional. To improve bibliographical stock and the access and consultation systems, paying special attention to the use of new technologies.

4.1.9 External Relations

In most of the units evaluated, **an increase in the external relations has been reported, mainly in the international domain**, which is positively evaluated by the assessors.

The strong feature most often mentioned by most units is **the liaison of the programs with local industry**. The co-operation with companies leads to an increase in the number of grants for students and to the promotion of work placements. In addition, this allows for a bigger presence of the programs in society and at the same time a new network is set up to collect information about how well students are prepared for employment in the ever dynamic and changing marketplace and also about their possible deficiencies. With the aim of continuing promoting these relations it has been suggested that the industrial placements should be included as an optional subject in the curricula.

It has also been observed that there is a need to **carry out studies on the characteristics of the job market, employment, demand and follow-up of graduates**, by means of the information obtained through the relations with the business world, as a feedback mechanism to improve the quality of education.

The participation in European Cooperation Programmes such as ERASMUS and SOCRATES and in the Latin-American equivalent such as INTERCAMPUS are considered to be strong points. However, in some

universities the participation of the academic staff and students is reported to be poor. Despite the considerable increase and the positive evaluation of the participation in the European Programmes, some weak points have also been noted: the scarcity of National exchanges and the lack of academic co-ordination across the universities of the European Union.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the external relations both at a national and international level. Participation in European and South-American co-operation programs. • Close links with local industrial and professional organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of exchanges at a national level, versus the development of the international cooperation. • Irregular participation in cooperation programs within the same institution. • Lack of academic co-ordination in the exchanges between universities of the European Union. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage industrial placements as part of the curriculum. • To promote exchanges and cooperation between different Spanish universities. • To continue supporting and promoting the cooperation with foreign institutions.

4.2 ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH

4.2.1 Context

One of the best-evaluated aspects is the **development of activities in the Third Cycle (doctorate) and the involvement of the lecturing staff on it**, despite the lack of acknowledgement of the teaching activity. There is a general opinion that both the research and teaching activity in the Third Cycle should be more explicitly recognised as part of the academic activity of the lecturing staff.

This opinion is in agreement with the perception that the lecturing **workload is excessive, which is an important factor that hinders the time dedicated to research by the academic staff**. A decrease in the lecturing load is suggested, not only in the number of hours but also in the number of subjects to be taught, promoting stability and continuity in the subjects assigned to each lecturer.

Another factor suggested as a possible way to encourage research activity is to introduce changes in the schedule **of the lecturing staff**, so that the concentration of the lecturing activities in one term becomes possible.

Difficulties **in the relations and co-ordination between the centres and departments** belonging to the same university have been noted. This fact has also been observed in other sections of this report.

The need to **revise the divisions of the departments** has been suggested, so that new units closer to the research groups can be set up. The current group organisation leads to certain geographical dissemination among the academic staff of a department in different centres, so that the relationships and the joint use of the resources available become very difficult.

Lastly, the need to promote **induction and training activities for teaching and research staff is also emphasised** in this section.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of activities in the Third Cycle and academic staff involvement in them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is geographical dispersion of lecturers in different centres, a joint use of the resources available becomes very difficult, and so does the relationships between the lecturing and research staff. • The time spent by the academic staff on research does not count as academic activity • Poor acknowledgement of the lecturing activity in the Third Cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage induction and training policies for the development of the lecturing and research staff. • To improve the communication between the research units that belong to the same university • To establish flexible criteria in the lecturing calendar, which allow the academic staff to organise the time spent on research more efficiently. • To encourage and acknowledge the research and lecturing activity in the Third Cycle in terms of credits, which should be taken into consideration when computing the academic activity.

4.2.2 Objectives

Just as in the teaching provision, a **lack of explicit formulation of objectives and plans has been observed in the research domain**. When they are formulated, it happens within the context of research groups, rather than as a department. Consequently, it is necessary to encourage the formulation of research objectives within the departments by means of internal debates and consensus.

There is a lack of information and dissemination policy regarding research activities among the members of the departments. It has been suggested that **improvement in the dissemination of the information and follow-up of the researchers activities** should be encouraged in the departments, through different mechanisms such as the registering of the ongoing research, regular seminars, reports, research guides, etc.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptation of the scientific policy to the different priority lines at three different levels: regional, national and European. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of explicit formulation of objectives and plans in the activities falling within the R+D domain. When they are formulated, it happens within the context of research groups, rather than at an institutional or departmental level. Absence of information and distribution policy regarding research activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To formulate objectives and programmes to develop research inside the departments and institutions by means of internal debates and consensus. To improve the dissemination and follow-up of the research activities within the departments through different mechanisms such as the registering of ongoing research, regular seminars, reports, research guides, etc.

4.2.3 Resources

An **increase in the dedication to research in the universities over the last years has been acknowledged**. The academic staff shows a high motivation to get involved in research activities. However, it has been noted that there is a lack of support staff to help research, such as technical and administrative

personnel and trainees. A general increase in the personnel for research has been recommended.

The departments have their own equipment, economic and human resources, which can be managed in different ways to carry out their research activities. A positive evolution in the acquiring of external economic resources has been observed, mainly through projects and contracts, (article 11 from the LRU). However, it has been emphasised that the economic resources and infrastructures available to carry out research are insufficient. Together with a general increase in the resources, the departments are to be encouraged to search for external funding sources, tendering for projects and contracts offered by different organisms and bodies.

On the other hand, it has been noted that there is a need to establish quality criteria to distribute resources among the departments or research groups, to increase income, to create new structures such as offices, libraries, laboratories, that is for the internal distribution of the budget available.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The departments have their own economic, equipment and human resources, which can be managed in different ways to carry out their R&D activities • Increase in the number of lecturers and doctors over the last years. High motivation to get involved in research activities. • Positive tendency in the searching for external funding sources, mainly through projects and contracts (article 11 from the LRU). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excess of assistant teachers to the detriment of a balanced, permanent lecturing staff, which would allow for a greater involvement in research. • Lack of support staff to help research, mainly technical and administrative personnel and trainees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish criteria, which allow for an increase in human resources involved in research. • To encourage the members of the department to search for external funding sources, tendering for any project or contract offered by different entities and organisms. • To establish quality criteria to provide the departments or research groups with resources, to increase income, to re-allocate resources and to create new infrastructures.

4.2.4 Structure

In a number of cases, **the stability and consolidation of the different groups and areas of research is highly evaluated, as are the creation of new areas and fields of research.** In general, any kind of initiative in this direction is encouraged. There has been an increase in the collaboration among different scientific areas within the same department or across different ones. It has been suggested that this goal should be encouraged, so that different research groups can apply to bigger projects, thus being more competitive.

There has also been an increase in the relations among universities, public and private institutions, as well as national and international ones. To continue developing these relations has been recommended and it has also been suggested that even the departments themselves should devise a plan of action to disseminate locally and regionally the possible ways of collaboration regarding research between the departments and different companies and institutions. As a way to support this dissemination, the introduction and creation of an effective information system in the departments that can circulate the results of the research activities across the university community has been suggested.

Lastly, in this section it has been noted that there is a need **to decrease the excessive administrative red tape involved in the management of projects and research** activities in general and that which affects the academic staff in particular.

Strong Points	Weak Points	Improvement Proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability and consolidation of different groups and areas of research, and the creation of new areas and fields of research. • Collaboration among different scientific areas within the same departments or across different ones. • Increase in the relations among universities, public and private institutions as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive administrative bureaucracy involved in the management of research, which affects the lecturing, and research staff. • Poor internal communication between the researchers that belong to the same university and even to the same department and cognate area, which makes the dissemination of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the relations and collaboration within the same department and between different ones, so that research teams can apply to bigger projects, thus being more competitive. • To consolidate different teams and areas of research and to establish general strategies and objectives for the research activity. • To encourage services to support the administrative

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
as national and international ones.	knowledge and results very difficult.	management of research projects and activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the relations with other institutions and research teams. To devise a plan to disseminate locally and regionally the possible ways of collaboration regarding research between the departments and different companies and institutions.

4.2.5 *Output and Quality*

The number of applications for research and grant projects has increased a lot, as has the number of projects and grants awarded by institutions which do not belong to the university. Nevertheless, in some cases this research is carried out by small teams, which causes the level of productivity of all the departments to decline.

The improvements discussed so far have led to a **sustained increment of the research results**, in terms of publications, thesis submitted, papers presented in conferences, etc., and of **the quality of those results**, which have increased international diffusion. However, it has been observed that, in some areas, an effort should be made to encourage scientific production (submission of doctoral thesis, attendance to conferences, publication in international journals). In spite of this, some reports show the difficulty found in some areas to evaluate the quality of the research results due to lack of external criteria for quality assessment, which represents considerable restrictions.

<i>Strong Points</i>	<i>Weak Points</i>	<i>Improvement Proposals</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained increase in the research results in terms of number of publications, PhD thesis submitted, papers presented in conferences, etc. as well as in the quality of these results, which have an increasing international recognition. • High number of applications for research and grant projects by doctorates; successful results regarding the number of project and grants awarded by institutions which do not belong to the university. • Perception on an important improvement in the quality of the research activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in the management of the information on the research results. • Lack of external criteria for quality assessment in many scientific areas. • Certain concentration of the research activity in a small number of people • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To generalise the creation and setting up of an efficient information and evaluation system with the aim of distributing the results of the research activities across the university community. • To encourage the setting up of external criteria adapted to the characteristics of different scientific areas in order to facilitate quality assessment. • To encourage the expansion of the research activity, increasing the number of people leading projects.

4.3 ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES

The assessment of services and management continues being very uneven and poor in the present round. Even though, some results can be presented.

It has been noted that there is **little strategic planning in the development of management and few well-defined objectives in the various centre services**. However, some planning and well-defined objectives can be found, together with a commitment for improvement in all levels within the institution. In some cases, this commitment is more noticeable, due to the profile of the personnel as regards youth, human values, experience, dedication, effort and above all a positive attitude towards changes.

The management processes are not identified or defined, and neither is a systematic analysis of their results. There is a need to identify, define, document and improve the key processes, as well as to produce process manuals.

There is a **rather generalised lack of mechanisms to know the level of satisfaction of the users and staff**. When there are some, they cannot be considered to be regular or systematic to know and utilise the user's opinion for services improvement. To have that information available is another proposal recommended.

The staff functions are poorly defined in general. This can be seen in the lack of co-ordination between central services and centre services, and between these and the academic managers of the centres. The development of actions to generally improve the services and management co-ordination has been suggested.

Incentive and motivation mechanisms for staff are scarce or non-existent. There is a lack of specific courses for the PAS, mainly on topics related to their own functions and in particular on strategies dealing with people. Suggestions to improve this situation are: an analysis of the needs of the PAS facilities, design of specific training courses and mechanisms for staff incentive and motivation, and in particular for a greater involvement in university life.

An increase in the staff required has been suggested, so that the different administrative and technical needs can be covered.

There is a great variety of units subjected to assessment under the heading *Services and Management*. This means that special attention should be paid when making generalisations about the conclusions drawn at this point. That is why a variety of improvement proposals drawn from the analysis carried out are highlighted here.

Improvement Proposals

- To encourage strategic planning in the development of management and the setting up of well-defined objectives in this domain.
- To carry out a analysis of the needs of non-academic staff to define their functions and to design specific development courses.
- To undertake the identification, definition, documentation and improvement of the key processes, as well as the production of process manuals.
- To establish mechanisms to evaluate, offer incentives and motivate the PAS.
- To develop actions to improve co-ordination between the centres and the Central Services. Likewise, to improve co-ordination between the non-academic staff and their respective governing bodies.
- To increase the space available, to renew equipment (mainly computing facilities) and to develop emergency and evacuation plans for the buildings.
- To set up mechanisms to measure the degree of satisfaction of the users with the services provided and to collect suggestions for improvement.
- To improve the information and help given to students and users in general, emphasising the use of new technologies.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 THE FULFILMENT OF THE PNECU OBJECTIVES

In this section we are going to discuss the level of fulfilment of the PNECU objectives in this second round in regard to the results presented before. As mentioned in the first part of this report, the three main PNECU objectives, are:

1. To encourage institutional assessment on higher education quality.
2. To design homogenous methodologies for quality assessment integrated in the current practise of the European Union.
3. To provide objective information that can be used as a base for different bodies to make decisions concerning their own competence.

The first objective has been completely fulfilled. The participation of the universities in the PNECU is very high. Almost all the public universities have taken part in either of the two sessions and a great number of private universities have also joined the process. It must be mentioned that the creation of new universities and new programs make the setting up of this process difficult, as it has been designed to carry out the assessment within a certain time perspective.

The universities have presented projects according to the different models, there being a considerable increase in the global projects in this second round. This has also meant a marked increase in the number of programs and units evaluated. Besides, it seems that, from the analysis of the different documents, it can be concluded that the universities are surpassing the objectives and expectations of the PNECU, given that certain activities have been undertaken which go beyond the objectives of the projects presented.

Certain actions have been carried out which have been used for training development, methodological revision and also for reflection. However, there is not clear evidence of the results of some of these special actions. Consequently, it seems convenient that their results should be more explicitly reported.

One of the most important elements in the development of the process has been the high participation of different members of the university community: about 4 000 people. In addition, the participation of well-known professionals who have collaborated in the process as external assessors must be emphasised. Everything seems to indicate that this participation has been one of the most highly valued elements of the process.

The second objective aims to *develop homogeneous methodologies for quality assessment, which are integrated in the current practice operative in the European Union*. Two years after the setting up of the Plan, on 24th September 1998, the recommendation of the EU Commission on European co-operation to guarantee quality in higher education (98/561/CE) was published, where it was reported that the methodology developed by the PNECU complies with the guidelines given to date in the European countries, which implies that the set objective has been met.

However, the great activity carried out in Spain makes it necessary to move forward in this direction, so it is advisable to reflect on some particular aspects of the methodology used: processes, documents, products, etc. The main strengths, weaknesses and improvement proposals of the methodology used in the PNECU are listed in the next tables.

The third aim of the PNECU *is to provide objective information that can be used as a base by the different governing bodies to make decisions within the framework of their own field*. Although it is true that a lot of information has been produced during the assessment process, it seems that this information is not adequately oriented towards the different decision-making domains: students, society, public administrations, enterprises, etc. Consequently, this objective seems to be met only partially.

5.2 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Bearing in mind the previous analysis, the Technical Committee has elaborated the following recommendations for improving both the methodological process and the quality of programs and departments.

5.2.1 General Character

This second PNECU round of assessments allows us to draw some general conclusions that implicitly mean as follows:

- In order to carry out the quality assessment of the Spanish universities efficiently and effectively, it is necessary to structure the system of regional agencies adequately, which can include one or several autonomous communities and one state agency to co-ordinate the regional agencies, in particular those aspects regarding assessment methodology and the delivery of information to society. In order to set up this infrastructure, it is necessary that both the state and the autonomous communities provide the necessary economic resources.
- The openness of all the processes carried out by the universities is a must, which applies to every public institution, specially highlighted by the Bologna Declaration. It is necessary to continue favouring this characteristic in the

coming PNECU phases, providing the citizens with more detailed information than it has been possible so far. For that purpose, it will be necessary to move forward in three directions:

- To elaborate and further publicise detailed reports on the assessment of the programs, departments and universities.
 - To devise a system of indicators that can provide quantitative and qualitative information on various aspects of the different functions carried out by the universities.
 - To set up the development of an assessment system of the programs and departments and to inform the entire society and the institution itself, according to the kind of information provided and to the end user who might be interested in it.
- In order to continue improving the assessment process, special attentions should be paid to the external assessment process in particular, which must be reconsidered as a whole, thus making the key aspects for quality improvement more explicit. It has been recommended that a new guide should be prepared, in which the role of the external assessors and the indicators of quality to be used should be clearly defined and the frameworks established should be useful. In order to have a better picture of the quality, it would be advisable to have some documents available during the external assessment, such as final-year projects, exam papers, textbooks used or notes taken. Finally, it would be convenient to go deeply into the formation of the external committees and to reconsider its size and composition.

5.2.2 On the Role of Regional Governments

Regional governments must assume a leading role in the management of Evaluation Plans, and for that purpose, the following recommendations are given:

- To develop a legal framework that governs the relations among the state, autonomous communities and universities as regards the assessment processes.
- To set up and consolidate the agencies, consortia and services necessary to make it possible to organise and carry out the institutional assessment processes in higher education institutions independently and efficiently.
- To establish systems to encourage assessment policies in higher education institutions and to reward any efforts made to improve the quality of the services provided.

Regional governments should encourage planning processes in particular as an essential strategy to promote changes and improvements within the universities, especially:

- To promote processes of strategic planning which define the mission and objectives of higher education institutions over the long-term.

The regional government should guarantee that the assessment processes have consequences, which are tangible for the various sectors involved. For this purpose the following strategies should be promoted:

- To disseminate the results of the assessment processes among the social sectors involved, so that the results can be known by all of them.
- To encourage the exchange of successful experiences and procedures between institutions with quality improvement programmes.
- To finance improvement plans contracted with the programme and to award prizes with the aim of encouraging competitiveness among the different institutions.

5.2.3 On the role of Universities

The Universities must encourage strategies that facilitate the participation and involvement of all members of the university community in the self-regulation processes. For this purpose, it is important:

- To strengthen planning systems in all the units and services of the institution, so that there is a clear formulation of the objectives to be met and the actions necessary to fulfil them.
- To set up, as a prerequisite for any kind of procedure or request concerning a program, department or service, the submission of an evaluative report that justifies the request in relation with the proposal for improvement.
- To sensitise the university community by developing a current of opinion favourable to planning and assessment as a self-regulatory strategy necessary to encourage changes and improvements in higher education institutions.

Universities must provide resources and facilities for the management of the assessment processes to be carried out adequately. For this aim it is important:

- To rationalise the different databases and resources that higher education institutions have with the aim of providing the information needed to carry out the institutional assessment processes.
- To provide the Evaluation Technical Units with suitable staff and the necessary resources to undertake their task as support of the assessment committees efficiently.
- To guarantee in particular that the process of electing the members of the committee is carried out adequately, so that they can develop their task independently and efficiently.

Universities should adopt a public institutional commitment with the assessment processes, paying special attention to the following points:

- To create the necessary structures inside the university - Committees, *Vice-rectorates*, Offices - to allow them to take the lead in the process in a clear and efficient way.
- To guarantee that all the processes are undertaken properly and that the deadlines and prerequisites associated to the participation in the PNECU are met.
- To disseminate the results of the different processes within the university community and to make the appropriate decisions, so that, in the light of the results, the institutional assessment is considered to be an strategy that offers "credibility" to promote changes and improvements as far as quality is concerned.

The universities should establish mechanisms to help avoid some problems highlighted in virtually all the programs assessed. In this respect, it would be advisable:

- To establish mechanisms to guarantee planning and co-ordination of teaching provision. Similarly, some mechanisms should be set up to co-ordinate research.
- To establish follow-up systems on the academic progress of students, providing individual attention in those cases in which it would be necessary.
- To establish follow-up systems on graduate employability and on the needs for qualification not only from the point of view of graduates but also from that concerning the socio-economic context, as has already been done in a few universities.

6. APPENDIXES

6.1 MEMBERS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The current composition of the Technical Committee is as follows (*Orden del Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*, 19th July 1999, BOE, 5th August 1999)

President

Ilmo. Sr. D. Vicente Ortega Castro, General Secretary of the Council of Universities.

Vice-president

Ilmo. Sr. D. Ismael Crespo Martínez, University General Officer.

Secretariat

Ilmo. Sr. D. Eduardo Coba Arango, Vice-secretary of Studies of the Council of Universities.

Members

Ilmo. Sr. D. Julio Casado Linarejos, Manager of the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Prospectiva* (National Assessment and Prospective Agency)

Sr. D. Mario de Miguel Díaz, Professor of Research and Diagnosis Methods in Education at the University of Oviedo.

Sr. D. Manuel Galán Vallejo, Director of the *Unidad para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas* (Unit for the Andalusian University Quality)

Sr. D. José Ginés Mora Ruiz, Lecturer in Applied Economy at the University of Valencia.

Sr. D. Miguel Ángel Quintanilla Fisac, Professor of Logic and Philosophy of Science at the University of Salamanca.

Sra. Dña. Gemma Rauret Dalmau, Director of the *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya* (Agency for Quality in Higher Education in Catalunya).

Sr. D. Francesc Solá Busquets, Manager of the *Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña*

Sr. D. Miguel Valcárcel Cases, Professor of Analytic Chemistry at the University of Córdoba.

D. Francisco Michavila Pitarch, Professor of Applied Mathematics at the *Universidad Politécnica*, Madrid.

6.2 TEAM PARTICIPATING IN THE ELABORATION OF THE REPORT.

In order to finance the present report, a special action was granted by the National Plan for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (*Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades*) coordinated by the University of León, in which the following people have participated:

Delegate Members of the Technical Committee

D. Eduardo Coba Arango, Vice-secretary of Studies of the Council of Universities

Dr. Mario de Miguel Díaz, Professor of Research and Diagnostic Methods in Education, University of Oviedo.

Dr. José Ginés Mora Ruiz, Lecturer in Applied Economy at the University of Valencia.

Dr. Miguel Ángel Quintanilla Fisac, Professor of Logic and Philosophy of Science at the University of Salamanca.

Dr. Miguel Valcárcel Cases, Professor of Analytic Chemistry at the University of Córdoba

Coordinator

Dr. Javier Vidal García, University of León

Team Leaders

Dr. Pello Apodaka Urquijo, *Universidad del País Vasco*

Dña. Meritxell Chaves Sánchez, University of Barcelona

Dña. M^a José Echeverría Cubillas, University of Salamanca

Dr. Héctor Grad Fuchsel, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Dr. Francisco Javier Grande Quejigo, University of Extremadura

Dña. Carme Melsio Núñez, University of Barcelona

D. Santiago Roca Martín, *Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña*

Dr. Juan Ruiz Carrascosa, University of Jaén

Analysts

D. Francesc Abad Esteve, *Universidad Pompeu Fabra*

Dña. Montserrat Aguilar Gómez, University of León

D. Lorenzo Almazán Moreno, University of Jaén

Dra. Ester Alonso Velasco, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Dr. Patricio González Valverde, University of Extremadura

Dra. Karmele Herranz Pascual, *Universidad del País Vasco*

Dña. Montserrat Mestres Romeu, *Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña*

Dña. Marta Rodríguez Martín, *Universidad del País Vasco*

Dña. Rosa Rubio Llorente, *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*

Dña. Mercedes Torrado Fonseca, University of Barcelona

Dña. M^a José Vieira Aller, University of León

6.3 ABBREVIATIONS USED.

ANEP – *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Prospectiva* (National Assessment and Prospective Agency)

MEC - *Ministerio de Educación* (Ministry of Education)

PAS – *Personal de Administración y Servicios* (Services and Management Staff)

PNECU – *Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades* (National Plan for Quality Assessment in Higher Education)

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