

CURRENT QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION SYSTEM STATUS FOR CHILEAN HIGHER EDUCATION*

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* Authors would like to thank Javier Loyola Campos for his commentaries on all versions of this paper.

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REVISTA DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

ISSN: 0185-2760.

Vol. XLI (2), No. 162,

Abril - Junio de 2012, pp. 87-109

Ingreso: 02/04/12 • Aprobado: 08/06/12

Resumen

El presente trabajo tiene como propósito central caracterizar el actual sistema de aseguramiento de la calidad de la educación superior en Chile. A través de la presentación y el análisis de datos oficiales se discuten las principales implicaciones que el modelo chileno de acreditación ha traído para el sistema de educación superior del país. Los resultados muestran que si bien el modelo chileno ha permitido un crecimiento más ordenado y coherente del sistema de educación superior en su conjunto, son aún muchas las limitaciones y desafíos que requieren ser enfrentados.

Palabras clave:

- Educación superior
- Aseguramiento de la calidad
- Acreditación

Abstract

This paper is aimed at characterizing the current quality assurance system for higher education in Chile. We discuss the main implications that the Chilean model of accreditation has brought to the country's higher education system by presenting and analyzing official data. Results show that, although the Chilean model has permitted a more orderly and coherent growth of the higher education system as a whole, there are still several limitations and challenges yet to be addressed.

Key words:

- Higher education
- Quality assurance
- Accreditation

Introduction

Contemporary university is now confronted with the challenge of positioning itself in a complex world, with new professionalism and skills demands associated with the emerging knowledge society. This is compounded by new pedagogical tasks and requirements of accountable and efficient institutional management. It is about building a university that can be on good terms with the academic community, while adding value to students' experience, that offers stimulating environments, appropriate curricula, implements relevant research, carries out a relevant assessment of its processes to meet the requirements of the social and productive landscape it is immersed in.

Studies show that there is a set of common factors that have significantly affected the development of tertiary education systems, such as the growth and diversification of higher education, the market logic in the sector and the need to respond to the requirements of globalization (Becker and Round, 2009; Billing, 2004; Brennan and Shah, 2000, El Khawas, DePietro-Jurand, and Holm-Nielsen, 1998; Harvey, 2002; Lemaitre, 2007; Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995).

The social and economic development of nations and an emphasis on the value of knowledge, have translated into a substantive growth of higher education coverage around the world. In the case of Latin America it increased from less than 300,000 students in 1950 to about 20 million today. Half of this enrollment takes place in the private sector. On the other hand, we went from 75 universities in 1950 to 3,000 institutions in the present day, of which two thirds are private (CINDA, 2011a; Espinoza et al., 2006).

In line with all of this, in the last two decades the need to incorporate mechanisms and tools for quality assurance and the improvement of institutions and programs, graduate and undergraduate, has increased, so that: i) society is assured of compliance with minimum standards of educational provision and adequate job performance of graduates; ii) relevant and sufficient information is delivered for decision-making; iii) users' demands are being met; iv) mechanisms are in place for higher education institutions (HEIs) to be accountable to the public.

The concept of quality in higher education may be linked to two approaches: the first is guided by the concept of quality assurance, understood as the fulfillment of certain minimum standards to ensure that graduates have the skills required to successfully perform their duties in the workplace. The second is based on the concept of quality improvement, in which institutions or programs voluntarily set goals for continuous improvement and are willing to be assessed by a third party in this process. Both processes may be combined, for which it is necessary to have fulfilled the mandatory minimum standards thereby joining the continuous improvement processes (Cullen, Joyce, Hassall and Broadbent, 2003; Herasme and Gonzalez, 2000; Gonzalez and Espinoza, 2007; Lemaitre, 2007; Perellon, 2007; Widrick, Mergen and Grant, 2002).

Quality assurance at the system level involves ongoing collaborative action by the State and the HEIs aimed at achieving optimal and harmonious development of the system itself and each of the institutions that make it up, with the aim of fulfilling the mission entrusted in them by society. That is, the cultural development of the country, the scientific and technological development and the training of scientific cadres, professionals and technicians required by society. In short, through quality assurance it is intended to adequately fulfill the country's needs, to be more efficient in the use of available resources and to deliver satisfactory services providing warranty for all citizenry (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2011; Pounder, 1999).

Within this role the State is responsible, among other things, of supporting the development of these institutions, so as to achieve such system macro equilibrium with an integrated long-term vision; ensuring the common good over particular interests, and as a guarantor of compliance with all actions to promote this end. It is the role of HEIs to be in a permanent evaluation process of all their teaching, research and extension activities. Thus, it is essential for HEIs to come up with creative, innovative and quality options within the framework of existing regulation.

Quality assurance mechanisms have been developed, both in Latin America and Europe, based on the particular needs and characteristics of higher education systems, generating very different approaches. However, it is possible to identify some common characteristics in their creation, development and implementation. Differences are mainly based on the functions and goals assigned to these schemes, the methodological frameworks associated with their implementation and the use given to their results (Lemaitre, 2007).

In Latin America quality assurance processes start with various models, resulting in a high degree of heterogeneity in countries where there are established systems, such as Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica and El Salvador. Some other systems are still in transition, such as in Brazil, Colombia and Chile. Elsewhere they are incipient, as in Paraguay, Ecuador, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia, Panama and Nicaragua. And finally, some countries in the region, such as Venezuela and Honduras, have no assurance mechanisms yet (Fernandez, 2008).

In general, quality assurance systems in Latin America tend to be complex and include licensing, assessment and accreditation of new HEIs, undergraduate and graduate programs. Similarly, quality assurance processes in some countries are conducted by different agencies. Public (in Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Puerto Rico), government (in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Uruguay), private (in Chile and Puerto Rico) and HEI associations (in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay) (CINDA, 2011b; Lemaitre, 2007).

In Chile the implementation of the accreditation scheme, despite not being legally binding, except for medicine and pedagogy programs, in practice has encouraged HEIs to evaluate themselves and then subject them-

selves to accreditation, to thereby gain access to public funds –competitive– oriented for institutional strengthening and development and funds to finance student aid programs. This regime is for both public and private institutions (Lemaitre, 2007).

Considering the background outlined, this paper aims to characterize the development of Chile's quality assurance scheme and its implications at institution, undergraduate and graduate program levels, highlighting its achievements and constraints as well as the challenges it now faces. From the Chilean experience a number of recommendations are identified for the implementation of a system of quality assurance in the Andean region.

Characterization of the Chilean higher education system

System Overview

The Chilean higher education system was drastically reformed by the laws issued in 1980 and 1981, when it went from being composed of eight state-funded universities (two national public and six private) to a diversified system with four types of institutions: universities, professional institutes (PIs), technical training centers (TTCS) and higher education establishments for the armed forces and law enforcement.

The legislation also allowed the creation of new private institutions. Indeed, there are two major legal differences between institutions of higher education. On the one hand, universities can be public or private and all must be nonprofit corporations and, second, the PIs and TTCS are private and can be for-profit organizations. In relation to their mission, the granting of degrees (bachelor, master and doctor) is a privilege reserved for universities as it is the granting of professional degrees that requires a previous degree. PIs can only grant professional degrees that do not require a prior degree. Finally, TTCS can only provide technical degrees (Espinoza et al., 2006).

Among universities we can distinguish those receiving direct government funding (grouped in the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities, CRCHU acronym in Spanish) and those that are self-financing. Among the former there are state and private entities that existed before the 1981 reform or that were created as a consequence of such reform.

Higher education institutions and venues

As seen in Table 1, the total number of HEIs has declined in the last two decades, from 302 to 176. This decrease is mainly due to the decrease of PIs (from 81 to 43), especially for the drop experienced by TTCS, which were reduced to 88 in the 1990-2010 period.

In Chile the development of higher education has expanded and diver-

sified geographically reaching regions and cities where two decades ago no programs were offered. As a result, there is now a wide coverage of undergraduate and graduate programs in most of the country, with many venues throughout the country.

Distribution of undergraduate programs according to HIES

Table 1.
Number of HEIs (1990-2010)

Type of Institution	1990	2000	2010
State Universities (CRCHU)	14	16	16
Private Universities with Direct Public Funding (CRCHU)	6	9	9
New Private Universities	40	39	35
PIs	81*	60	43
TTCs	161	116	73
Total	302	240	176

*Includes two state institutes which were later transferred to private hands
Source: Ministry of Education (2011)

In 2008, there were slightly more than 3,400 Chilean university undergraduate programs, a figure similar to that observed in previous years. Among CRCHU member universities the total programs has had to be reduced during the 2005-2008 period, while in the case of new private universities programs offered have remained constant, almost doubling the number offered by the Council's universities (Table 2).

In the field of graduate programs in 2008 there were 858, of which 726 were Masters (85%) and 132 doctoral. Now, if the analysis is limited to the type of institution that offers these programs, 61% of master's and 89% of doctorates correspond to CRCHU universities (Table 3).

Undergraduate and graduate enrollment

Undergraduate enrollment is highly concentrated in universities and is divided almost equally between CRCHU universities and new private universities. In this picture it should be noted that in the past 25 years university enrollment has almost quintupled and this growth is even more remarkable at the new private universities, which went from less than 3,000 students, in the early 1980s to more than 240,000 at present (Table 4).

Table 2. Number of undergraduate programs by type of university (2005-2008)

Type of Institution	2005	2006	2007	2008
State Universities (CRCHU)	895	860	672	710
Private Universities with Direct Public Funding (CRCHU)	518	525	394	432
New Private Universities	2,239	2,233	2,090	2,279
Total	3,652	3,618	3,156	3,421

Source: NCED (2009)

Moreover, PIS enrollment has also grown in the last decades but at a more moderate rate, currently representing around one fifth of the total system enrollment. At the same time, enrollment at TCCs has shown an uneven performance over the past three decades, reaching its lowest point at the beginning of this decade and rebounding in recent years, which is explained by the creation of the Millennium Scholarship Program in 2001,

Table 3. Offer of master's and doctoral programs by type of university (2008)

Type of University	Tipo de programas		
	Magíster	Doctorado	Total
CRCHU Universities	445	118	563
New Private Universities	281	14	295
Total	726	132	858

Source: NCED (2009)

which aims to support access to higher education for low-income youth (Table 4).

Graduate enrollment has significantly increased over the last 25 years, from just under 2,000 to over 25,000 students. Such enrollment is concentrated mainly at CRCHU universities (Table 5).

Theoretical and legal frameworks for the quality assurance and accreditation system in Chilean higher education

Theoretical framework

According to Lemaitre (2007) quality assurance systems pursue three identifiable purposes: quality control, quality assurance and continuous improvement. These purposes are complementary.

Table 4. Undergraduate enrollment by type of institution (1983-2008)

Type of Institution	1983	1990	2000	2008
Universities	110,133	127,628	302,572	510,112
CRCHU	107,425	108,119	201,186	269,940
New Private	2,708	19,509	101,386	240,172
PIs	25,415	40,006	79,904	162,848
With direct fiscal support*	17,891	6,472	0	0
Private	7,524	33,534	79,431	162,848
CFTs	39,702	77,774	53,184	95,891
Total	175,250	245,408	435,660	768,851

* Students receiving direct fiscal contributions for being eligible for State subsidies.
Source: Ministry of Education (2009)

Quality control refers to the responsibility of governments to ensure that higher education provisions meet minimum quality standards. It rose from the need to respond to the profound structural changes occurring in higher education systems around the world, such as the growth in the number and/or diversity of HEIs, the diversification of education and the need for protection mechanisms for users. In general, quality control mechanisms are often mandatory and may correspond, first, to the approval

Table 5. Enrollment in graduate programs by type of university (1983-2008)

Type of University	1983	1990	2000	2008
CRCHU	1,933	2,143	6,487	17,993
New Private	0	0	1,218	7,355
Total	1,933	2,143	7,705	25,348

* Recibían aporte fiscal directo por ser entidades dependientes del Estado
Fuente: Mineduc (2009)

or licensing, as the initial authorization for the operation of the institution or program; and secondly, to accreditation, certifying that minimum standards set by the relevant agencies are being met (Milliken and Colohan, 2004; Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994).

Quality assurance is an evaluation process leading to a decision of formal acceptance, rejection or, in some cases, conditionality regarding the degree to which an institution or program meets the requirements set (Stephenson, 2004; Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). In relation to the system of accreditation, the focus is comprehensive as it examines the mission, resources and procedures at play in an institution. The main objective is to provide reliable information about the extent to which institutions or programs offered meet and fulfill the expectations associated with a particular reference group, whether disciplinary, professional or guild. The institutional and program accreditation is carried out by various bodies, including the self-evaluation or internal evaluation and external evaluation. It may be mandatory or voluntary and has a limited expiry time, formally defined by the responsible agency, which may be state or private.

Permanent improvement is accomplished through academic audits (quality audits), in which the focus is on policy and institutional mechanisms to ensure the quality of the institution, its functions and programs. The audit is focused on continuous improvement, so the responsibility for quality lies within the HEI capacity to develop and implement policies and mechanisms for self-regulation. Audits may be voluntary or mandatory; it is essentially based on institutional goals and purposes, and whether there are standards referring to self-regulation procedures (Massy, 2003). Internal or self-evaluation plays a central role, and external evaluation is usually limited to the validation of the results of internal evaluation (CINDA, 2009:14-16; Lemaitre, 2007; Stensaker, 2003).

In Chile the National Accreditation Commission (CNA, Spanish acronym) conceived accreditation as certification given to public institutions, undergraduate and graduate programs that meet certain previously defined quality criteria. It is obtained as a result of a voluntary process to which institutions are subjected. It considers three stages: the self-assessment report, the peer-committee report and the resolution issued by the CNA. Accreditation is intended to encourage and provide public assurance on the quality of HEIs and undergraduate and graduate programs through systematic evaluation exercises. The accreditation of institutions and programs are processes, which although complementary, are independent (CNA, 2007).

Regulatory framework

According to Espinoza and Gonzalez (2011) evaluation and accreditation processes first started in Chile in December 1980, with the enactment of an Executive Order (Decreto Ley 3,541) which involved, among other things, a diversification of the system, self-financing, the merger of state universities' campuses, the creation of regional institutions and authorizations for

the creation of private institutions. Based on these changes, authorization processes for operating were established, i.e. the licensing granting autonomous operation for new private universities that met all the requirements. Quality control was mainly based on student assessment carried out by traditional universities.

Subsequently, in 1990, with the Constitutional Law of Education (LOCE, acronym in Spanish) came the creation of the Higher Education Council (CSE, same), an autonomous body, with representation from various sectors of society, responsible for monitoring progress and system quality. This is how a licensing process was established consisting of oversight by the CSE for a period not shorter than five years nor longer than 10, until full autonomy is reached. During this stage accreditation was not envisaged as a means for quality assurance.

A third stage started the Quality with Equity Improvement Program in Higher Education (MECESUP acronym in Spanish). In this context, in March 1999, the National Commission for Undergraduate Program Accreditation (CNAP, same) was created, with the idea of formally introducing a system for the accreditation of institutions and programs. Moreover, CNAP was entrusted with the task of designing and proposing a national system of quality assurance for all higher education. In 2002, a CNAP pilot project was set into motion for the institutional accreditation of autonomous universities in Chile. As well, as part of MECESUP, in September 1999, the National Commission on Accreditation of Postgraduate Studies (CONAP, acronym in Spanish) was created, which had as its primary function to propose the institutional foundations, design and implementation of a formal evaluation process for master's and doctoral programs offered by autonomous universities .

The proposal developed by the CNAP and CONAP in late 2006 resulted in the Law 20,129 (Quality Assurance Act), which gave rise to the National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education, which comprises the core functions of information, licensing, and program and institution accreditation (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2011). i) Information refers to the identification, collection and dissemination of necessary background data for system management and public information. ii) Licensing of new HEIs is conducted in accordance with LOCE provisions. iii) Institutional accreditation analyzes existing mechanisms within the autonomous HEIs for ensuring quality, assessing both the existence of such mechanisms as well as their implementation and results; iv) Program accreditation verifies the quality of programs offered by autonomous HEIs, according to their stated purposes and criteria established by academic and professional communities.

According to Law 20,129 provisions accreditation is valid from one to seven years for undergraduate programs and institutions, and from one to 10 years for graduate programs. As it expires HEIs, undergraduate and graduate programs may undergo a new evaluation process in order to become accredited again. To this effect they should apply before the end date of their current accreditation.

The new Quality Assurance Law creates a Coordinating Committee and a National Accreditation Commission (CNA), which accredits institutions and authorizes, through certification, the participation of private agencies in program accreditation, thus complementing its own work. This mixed agency system that incorporates public and private entities implies greater openness in quality assurance schemes, to the extent that new actors, academic, disciplinary and professional, are involved in conducting the accreditation processes and the development of new practices (Rodríguez, 2009).

Some normative features that distinguish the Chilean system for quality assurance are: respect for institutional autonomy; that the process is voluntary, except for medicine and pedagogy programs; taking self-assessment and peer evaluation into consideration as key aspects of quality assessment; the presence of public and private agencies; promoting self-regulation; and the creation of easy access mechanisms to information for decision-making by users and institutions.

Evolution and current status of accreditation in Chile

Number of accredited HEIS

In Table 6 we can see the changes experienced by the regulatory system in the 2000 to 2011 period by type of HEI. Interestingly, we can observe that along with a decrease in current licensed institutions there is a significant increase in HEIS with full autonomy, meaning that the regulatory system has been consolidated over the years. This is mainly due to the stability that the university system has been achieving to the detriment of the segment represented by professional institutes (PIs) and technical training centers (TTCs).

Table 6. Status of HEIs according to the regulatory system (2000-2011)

Situation	Universities		PIs		TTCs		Total	
	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011
Certified	19	2	17	4	43	23	79	29
Under assessment	7	0	32	8	0	0	39	8
Under supervision	0	0	0	0	67	17	67	17
Autonomous*	38	58	11	32	6	33	55	123
Total	64	60	60	44	116	73	240	177

* Includes 16 state universities and nine existing private or derived from those in 1981 that were not subject to examination or licensing
Source: authors' based on official data by the Ministry of Education (2000) and (2011)

Table 7 illustrates the situation institutions hold in relation to accreditation. First, in the last decade there has been a gradual increase in accredited institutions. 77% of private universities, and all CRCHU universities have been accredited to date. While most professional institutes (PIs) and technical training centers (TTCs) have not been submitted to institutional accreditation, which can be interpreted as a lack of interest or that they do not have the mechanisms and instruments to ensure the quality of the programs they offer.

**Table 7. Number of institutions accredited each year (2004-2010)
(in December)**

Type of Institution	2004	2007	2010
State Universities (CRCHU)	5	15	16
Private Universities (CRCHU)	4	9	9
New Private Universities	3	19	27
PIs	2	12	15
TTCs	0	8	12
Armed Forces HEIs	0	1	5
Total	14	64	84

Source: CNA (2010a)

Accreditation of courses and programs

As seen in Table 8, there has been a steady increase in the number of accredited undergraduate programs in this decade. Of the total accredited programs in 2008 about 90% were offered by CRCHU universities, while only 8% were offered by new private universities. This shows a huge imbalance in the level of certification these institutions hold.

Currently in Chile, 11,007 programs are offered at the undergraduate level. Of these, one in four is in the process of being shut down (Table 9). This could be explained by two reasons: oversupply and/or accreditation quality requirements.

For graduate programs, the latest available data (Table 10) show that in 2008 three out of four of these programs were accredited by the CNA (80% of PhDs and 74% of masters). Now, if the analysis is limited to the type of institution there is a clear predominance of accredited graduate programs in CRCHU universities: 84% of master's and 87% of doctorates. In contrast, new private universities register only 59% of master's and 21% of PhD accredited programs (CNED, 2009).

Tabla 8. Carreras de pregrado acreditadas según tipo de institución (2001-2008)

Tipo de institución	2001	2005	2008
Universidades estatales (CRUCH)	3	79	155
Universidades privadas (CRUCH)	0	126	177
Nuevas universidades privadas	0	13	35
IPs	0	0	5
CFTs	0	0	0
IES de las fuerzas armadas y de orden	0	1	2
Total	3	219	374

Fuente: CNA (2010a)

Nota: El número de programas acreditados corresponde a aquellos con acreditación vigente (dato acumulado) a diciembre de cada año

Scope, limitations and weaknesses of the higher education accreditation system in Chile

Judging by the results observed the accreditation system in Chile shows that requirements may not have been consistent, in some cases, with the quality required for tertiary education. Proof of this is that in 2010, 31 HEIs (16 universities, 10 PIs and TTCs) were subjected to the CNA accreditation process, all of which were accredited. A similar situation has occurred at the program level with the development of private accreditation. According to available data, 95.4% of teaching and all medical programs subjected to the process in 2009 were accredited (CNA, 2010b).

Added to the above is the scant relationship between program accreditation and student learning outcomes, for accreditation is process-oriented rather than reflecting the results of training (Domínguez, Meckes, San Martín, Sánchez and Bascope, 2011). The most illustrative case was the high proportion of teacher training programs that were accredited whereas their graduates scored poorly on the professional certification test (Prueba Inicia), where in 2010 only 1% of them showed dominion over 75% of the pedagogical knowledge required for professional practice (Ministry of Education, 2010).

It is worth noting that one of the peculiarities of institutional and program accreditation processes in Chile is that they operate independently from each other. Therefore, it is possible to find accredited institutions that do not have all their programs accredited and non-accredited institutions that have some certified programs. This is because in Chile institutional accreditation started first, and then came the accreditation of programs, but these processes are not mutually exclusive.

One of the complex issues that may affect the results of accreditation is that students from unaccredited universities have no access to financing guaran-

teed by the State, which is the main source of funding available for private and public HEIs (although for the latter it does not represent their only option) to issue loans, allowing them to increase enrollment and have greater financial sustainability. This conditioning imposed by the financing, requiring institutions to be accredited, distorts the results and/or influences the decisions of

Tabla 9. Número de carreras de pregrado vigentes y en proceso de cierre según tipo de institución (2010)

Tipo de institución	Vigentes	En cierre
Universidades	3,763	890
IPS	2,845	1,471
CFTS	1,791	247
Total	8,399 (76%)	2,608 (24%)

Fuente: Mineduc (2011)

CNA counselors when ruling for accreditation. Another critical aspect about the mechanics of quality assurance is that the CNA is formed by 15 counselors, of which seven are HEI representatives, this inevitably affects their decisions in favor of the institutions they represent.

Private agencies that recently joined the quality assurance system have received criticism for some of their actions, for various reasons. First, because some of their directors have been directly or indirectly linked to institutions with which they had or have had contractual relations, which could then influence their decisions. Also, there is the case of members of accrediting agencies that for different reasons have joined the staff of institutions that have been recently accredited by their very agencies. Second, private agencies are di-

Tabla 10. Oferta de programas de magíster y doctorado según tipo de institución y régimen de acreditación (2008)

Tipo de universidad	Magíster		Doctorado		Total	
	Total programas	Programas acreditados	Total programas	Programas acreditados	Total programas	Programas acreditados
Del CRUCH	445	84%	118	87%	563	85%
Privadas nuevas	281	59%	14	21%	295	57%
Total	726	74%	26	80%	858	75%

Fuente: CNED (2009)

rectly linked to universities whether public or private, which conditions their impartiality. Third, it has been suggested that these entities have no competence for the accreditation of graduate programs, at the master's and medical specialization levels, which may limit their assessments.

In regards to information that institutions must disclose for accreditation processes, one of the disputed issues is related to resource management and revenue generated by universities, which by law are not for profit. In that sense, there have been situations where private institutions, circumventing the spirit of the law, do not reinvest their profits in their institutional projects (Torres, Guzman and Riquelme, 2011).

Another aspect that calls the quality assurance system into question is insufficient oversight of the campuses that some institutions may have. Indeed, in 2007 there were 595 HEI campuses of which 141 were not formally registered before the CNA (CNAP, 2003; Rodríguez, 2009). These venues were detected in the advertising that institutions made regarding programs offered. An efficient oversight involves special monitoring to ensure the adequacy of facilities, resources and teachers in the educational provision, issues that have often not been assessed by accrediting agencies.

The circumstances described in the preceding paragraphs have questioned the quality assurance system and the accreditation regime in different instances. To the extent that the outgoing president of the CNA, Emilio Rodríguez, said that "if all institutions that applied in 2010 were accredited, [it would mean that] either this represents a marked improvement in tertiary education institutions in Chile or simply, requirement levels have fallen to pitiful levels" (Torres et al., 2011). Part of the 2010 anomaly can be explained because the government failed to promptly appoint a new president for the CNA after the incumbent's resignation. In Chile the CNA president is a key figure that has the power to weigh in when voting is tied.

Now, in 2011, with the renewal of some CNA members, there has been a noticeable change in the results of institutional accreditation. For example, two new universities that participated in the process of re-accreditation failed, which reflects that the newly appointed council might be more demanding than the previous.

The role of self-regulation and the state's role in quality assurance

Legislation in the eighties and later in LOCE established that tertiary system regulation should be guided by the same mechanisms that govern the open market, where the State would only intervene in that which is essential for economic development and in which no private entity showed interest (subsidiary state). In this context, once granted autonomy new universities are not subject to any regulation and program provision is based on enrollment demand, which is in turn influenced by promotional campaigns to attract students (Gonzalez and Espinoza, 2011).

In Chile there are formal accreditation processes that operate according to traditional standards. However, once institutions have gained full autonomy the state has no intention to control their activities. Given this, autonomous entities can create new facilities, distance, undergraduate and graduate programs, without any constraints, implying that there is a heterogeneous and unregulated supply (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2009).

The State does not have specialized agencies to ensure compliance with regulations and accommodate end user demands. However, there are instances that are not exclusive nor specialized, but which have some jurisdiction over the subject. Such is the case of the Courts of Justice and Consumer Defense Council, which have operated in areas of their jurisdiction. For these functions the current Sebastián Piñera's administration, sent a bill for the creation of the Superintendency of Higher Education in late 2011. This future agency will oversee universities, PIs and TCS matters within its competences.

In short, the Chilean system is governed to a great extent by market logic, under legislation dating back 30 years and that by its nature is difficult to change, leaving the state in a situation of limited intervention from a regulation perspective. In 2011 there were student demonstrations that brought this situation to light. They called for greater state intervention in favor of quality provision and equity in access to the higher education system.

Analysis of the model applied and its implications

Progress and achievements in the field of quality assurance

The Chilean higher education system has experienced significant growth in recent decades. In this framework, the quality assurance system, despite having some weaknesses, has had a significant impact and has allowed growth to occur in a more orderly fashion and with more guarantees for users. It has also enabled the development of information systems at both national, institutional and program levels, contributing to improving the conditions of access, admission and employment for graduates, which is critical for decision-making by different actors when entering the system.

As for institutions, the introduction of an accreditation scheme has led to the creation of offices for strategic planning, institutional analysis and evaluation, thus enshrining the creation of specialized units in these processes, while strengthening a culture of self-evaluation. Also, they are using quality criteria and standards for these processes. Meanwhile, higher education applicants have begun to assess the indicators that show the strengths and weaknesses presented by the institutions they apply for. Likewise, mechanisms in place allow to monitor learning outcomes and impacts in the workplace through graduate follow ups and employer surveys (CINDA, 2007).

The implementation of the quality assurance system has involved establis-

hing certain minimum standards for institutional performance, which directly or indirectly has led to the closure of institutions, either by choice or by accrediting agencies ruling.

Regarding state universities, accreditation processes have raised awareness for increased efficiency in the use of public resources. And in the case of private accreditation it has generated greater demand for the reinvestment of profits in educational projects, in order to provide adequate service to students, although at this level there are still some defaults under this law.

In regard to the programs it may be concluded that there has been a substantial increase in accreditation processes, which reflects the growing importance of this dimension within HEIs. Undoubtedly, program accreditation has rendered more relevant information for users and has improved the efficiency of training and graduate professional performance.

Conclusions

Challenges facing the quality assurance system

The challenges the Chilean quality assurance system faces can be categorized into three areas: system, institutions and actors.

i) System: Self-assessment and accreditation processes are not generally thought of as instances intended for continuous quality improvement at various levels. In some cases these processes are perceived as control mechanisms, even if they lead to corrective actions, they have not become an incentive for each of the actors and organizations to take the challenge of continuous self-improvement and perennial commitment to quality.

Moreover, the need for stimulating a more fluid and constant dialogue between the CNA and private agencies accreditation has emerged to establish homogeneous, consistent and reliable criteria and procedures for the entire system.

In the same vein, it is essential to define clear criteria for selecting accreditation evaluators to ensure transparency and fairness at the system level in all programs and institutions. In particular it is important to improve the criteria and standards for programs, to include the views of students, faculty, employers and key informants.

It becomes necessary to establish a country-wide unified qualifications framework in order to establish competences that facilitate access to jobs, as well as student mobility across institutions.

No less important is the need to strengthen international accreditation agencies, so as to ensure the possibility of continuing studies in other countries and simplify credential validation and recognition for graduates to be able to exercise their professions in a cross-border context. In this regard, higher education quality should be monitored so as to ensure appropriate training that is internationally recognized, especially in the Andean region.

Another challenge that must be addressed at the system level is the high number of non-accredited TTCs, particularly because this type of institution serves the poorest sectors for whom higher education is an important agent for social mobility (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2011).

ii) Institutions: This level presents several challenges. For example, a permanent culture of self-evaluation has not yet been established and rather, accreditation processes are perceived as situations that from time to time both programs and institutions must deal with. This requires the development of a continuous process of quality improvement in all university functions, namely teaching, research, management and the delivery of services, with a long term perspective.

It is necessary to improve information systems, both in terms of systematization, as the construction of indicators that efficiently reflect reality and thus allow timely decisions. Among other things this requires information and the tools to avoid high rates of educational lag, repetition and dropout rates present in different programs that have implications for both students and their families, as well as in the pricing structure and revenue for institutions.

It is also required to improve performance evaluation processes for teachers to optimize the channeling of resources for their academic and pedagogical improvement.

Similarly, program and institutional evaluation and accreditation processes should become a forum for promoting research and technological innovation in higher education (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2011).

iii) Actors: One of the main challenges is that program and institutional evaluation and accreditation highlight the importance of teaching and improving learning levels for students.

Finally, information resulting from self-assessment and accreditation processes should become an essential tool to enhance public information and increase the levels of consultation by the end users (Espinoza and Gonzalez, 2011).

Recommendations for implementing a quality assurance system in the Andean region

As part of a harmonious development of the higher education system, the Chilean State cannot evade its regulatory responsibility in supervising the progress and achievements of the system as a whole on the basis of the guidelines that the State itself has set. To do this it is necessary to have tools and mechanisms for measuring and controlling progress, achievement and impact of policy and system development globally through appropriate indicators. Additionally, the state should establish regulatory frameworks with relevant criteria and standards that are common to the Andean region, to

support the processes of quality assurance and cross-border recognition of studies.

In line with the above, in each of the countries of the region the state should be the guarantor of public faith in regard to the roles that society has bestowed on universities and the recognition of diplomas and degrees that reflect the right skills for academic and professional performance. This way the recognition of higher-level learning can be made more accessible. For this the advanced experience of Mercosur can be used, in particular for the accreditation of programs using EXAM (Experimental Accreditation Mechanism) models and SOUTH-RAU (South Regional Accreditation of University Programs).

Similarly, each country should have bodies and agencies to monitor compliance with regulations, for enforcing them and for listening to complaints from users. It is also suggested to collect, organize and disseminate all public information that is pertinent to the decision making of relevant agencies, such as post-secondary institutions and users/beneficiaries both nationally and regionally.

Regarding quality assurance, appropriate criteria and standards should be generated to regulate HEIs proper functioning (including offering undergraduate and graduate programs), while ensuring compliance with minimum standards, as well as their constant improvement, in a harmonized way with all countries in the region. By monitoring the oversight and regulation mechanisms the aim would be to ensure that standards are met for all sectors and regulations applied fairly regardless of the nature of the institutions in all the different countries of the region (Gonzalez and Espinoza, 2011).

The state in every country should assume a greater role in terms of the supervision and regulation of the system, particularly in Chile, where a neo-liberal model in higher education prevails.

One area where this role is more critical is in ensuring equity for all beneficiaries of the higher education system. An indicative planning with stimuli and different forms of financing to guide the development of the tertiary system as a whole in each of the countries in the region is suggested. It is also necessary to establish a set of indicators to document progress, achievements and impact of policies, strategies and actions set at the national and regional level. For example, establishing productivity and employability indicators for institutions and programs (undergraduate and graduate), that would increase some state contributions.

It is advisable, from the perspective of integration and regional development, the intervention of a multinational body to ensure the quality of distance educational programs, especially those that involve some level of social risk. Moreover, the delivery of full details of enrollment and conditions for each program in every country involved should be required for this modality.

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