INQAAHE REVIEW REPORT

SISTEMA NACIONAL DE ACREDITACION DE LA EDUCACION SUPERIOR (SINAES)

San Jose, Costa Rica

May 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sistema Nacional de Accreditacion de la Education Superior (SINAES) requested that the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) conduct an "adherence review" of the agency. This review, conducted by a team of three highly experienced international evaluators, measured the policies and practices of SINAES against INQAAHE's widely published "Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance."

The team visited the SINAES offices on March 22-24, conducting there and elsewhere in San Jose a series of interviews with the National Accreditation Council, the SINAES Executive Director and staff, the Minister of Education, the rectors of adhering private universities, the quality managers from a variety of public and private universities, an impressive number of representatives from organizations and government agencies that collaborate with SINAES, national peers, and students. The rectors of public universities registered their support of SINAES, although an unfortunate scheduling problem prevented the anticipated face-to-face discussion between them and the team. These scheduled interviews together with the substantial amount of information and analysis provided by SINAES in its self-study documents and annexes allowed the team to conduct a thorough and impartial review.

The team determined that SINAES met fully ten of the INQAAHE Guidelines and it provided several commendations for how carefully SINAES had structured the agency and its accreditation programs to meet and, in some cases, exceed the international good practices. The team determined that

SINAES substantially met the two other INQAAHE requirements, one that called for a formal appeal process involving people not involved in the contested decision and the other that called for policies and procedures related to transnational/cross border education. In both situations, the team noted that in practice, if not in policy, SINAES was meeting the spirit of the Guideline if not exactly meeting the letter of it.

The team visited SINAES at a significant juncture in its young history. Focused on accreditation of careers, the agency had in a short period of time established the reputation for being the national resource on quality in higher education in Costa Rica. It also had provided accreditation services noted for fairness, objectivity, and international credibility. It had created a staff of diverse competencies and with a reputation for excellent and helpful service.   In short, it had at the time of the visit considerable status within and without the higher education community in Costa Rica. But SINAES had accredited a small number of careers relative to the total university offerings of careers in Costa Rica; moreover, less than one-third of the nation's universities "adhered" to SINAES. With the passage of Law No. 16,506 in February 2010, the models and processes created by SINAES will be tested by the rapid increase in demand for its services. With few exceptions, everyone with whom the team met understands that the next few years will be both an opportunity and a challenge for SINAES. The team has concluded that by meeting fully or substantially all of the INQAAHE "Guidelines," SINAES is well positioned to maintain its excellence and credibility in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies of Higher

Education (INQAAHE) has over the years created, revised, and promulgated a

set of guidelines for creating and evaluating higher education quality assurance

bodies. In the introductory paragraphs of most recent version of the "Guidelines

of Good Practice in Quality Assurance" that were adopted in August 2007,

INQAAHE offers to provide a review of an agency against those Guidelines:

> an agency might wish for various reasons (such as sending a signal to its
> constituents or other agencies) to undertake or undergo an 'adherence
> review'. In this case, reviewers should state whether the EQAA [External
> Quality Assurance Agency] meets each individual Guideline fully,
> substantially, partially, or fails to meet the Guideline. The report should
> indicate specific areas in which shortcomings were observed, and it should
> include suggestions for follow-up actions needed to address these.

The Sistema Nacional de Acreditacion de la Educacion Superior (SINAES,

or in English, National Accreditation System of the Higher Education of Costa

Rica) requested an "adherence review," which INQAAHE agreed to conduct.

INQAAHE created a team of international experts that SINAES reviewed and

approved. On March 22-24, 2010, that team, already prepared by studying the

self-study materials and reports provided in advance by SINAES, visited the

SINAES offices in San Jose, conducted a series of interviews with constituencies

of SINAES, and evaluated SINAES's adherence to the "Guidelines." The team

met with the governing body and staff of the agency, the Minister of Education,

national peer reviewers, rectors of private universities, quality managers from

private and public universities, students, and representatives of external groups

that collaborate with the agency. A scheduling misunderstanding prevented the

team from holding the planned meeting with rectors of the public universities. However, they submitted to the team a formal letter expressing their support of SINAES. Annex 1 contains a list of the people interviewed by the team during its evaluation.

The following report summarizes the team's findings and puts into writing all of the key points made by the team in its concluding session held with the SINAES Board, Executive Director, and agency staff.

The self evaluation documents and the site visit permitted the team to conduct a thorough and objective review of SINAES. Its ability to do so also rested heavily on the excellent support provided by SINAES: a good working environment for the team at the SINAES offices, good space for holding conversations with groups of various sizes, effective coordination of a full schedule of meetings including one with the Minister of Education, excellent staff support with quick responses to team queries, warm hospitality for the team and all of those invited to speak with it, and, not least, the services of a superb simultaneous translator.

SINAES provided to the team the thorough self-study report it had prepared in 2007 to support its application for accreditation with the Central America Accreditation Council (CCA). It supplemented that document and its multiple Annexes with a 2009 update of all of the important data presented in the CCA self-study. That update included a few other Annexes as well as updates to previous Annexes. While the team found these key documents, both in English and Spanish (although almost all of the Annexes were only in Spanish), to be

invaluable in their initial understanding of SINAES and its practices. The team experienced some challenges in aligning the evidence for CCA standards with the evidence suggested by INQAAHE as appropriate for supporting adherence to the "Guidelines." It would have been helpful if SINAES in its update report had explicitly addressed the INQAAHE Guidelines or referred to sections of the CCA report where particular parts of the Guidelines were covered.

It should be noted that shortly before the team's arrival, the legislature of Costa Rica adopted a new law amplifying rather significantly the public policy role of SINAES in Costa Rica higher education. The potential impact of that law on the agency inevitably shaped many of the important conversations held by the team. As will be noted below, the law will likely result in the demand from several currently non-adhering universities and their careers (degrees, qualifications) for accreditation; adhering universities might well seek accreditation for more careers as well. The term "avalanche" was used several times during the team's interviews to define the anticipate growth of demand.

It should also be noted that SINAES accreditation has so far touched a relatively small segment of Costa Rica higher education although the numbers of accredited careers and adhering universities have gradually increased over the years. Costa Rica has four state universities with 47 regional campuses, a large number of which are part of the State University at a Distance. It has 50 private universities, some with multiple campuses. There are also five international universities operating in Costa Rica. These universities offer many careers, or degree programs. It also has 59 public and private "para-universities" that offer

short-term programs. The para-universities are currently not under SINAES'

remit. SINAES reports that in 2005 the universities offered a total of

approximately 1263 careers. As of 2008, SINAES had accredited only 51 of

those careers.

Another note useful for understanding some of the terminology in this

report: an institution may choose to "adhere" to SINAES upon approval by the

agency and make a single-time payment for the "right of adhesion." Although

implementation of the new law may influence current policy and practice, an

adhering university currently does not necessarily need to offer a SINAES-

accredited career, but an institution must "adhere" to SINAES when one of its

careers is accredited. SINAES only accredits careers.

This following report is organized around each Guideline and provides the

INQAAHE wording of each before summarizing the team's findings,

commendations, and recommendations.

EVALUATION OF SINAES' ADHERENCE TO INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 1.
The Governance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the EQAA. The statement explicitly provides that external quality assurance is a major activity of the EQAA, and it requires a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives of the EQAA. There is evidence that the statement of objectives is implemented pursuant to a practical management plan that is linked to EQAA resources. The ownership and governance structure is appropriate for the objectives of the agency.

SINAES stands on a firm legal foundation laid by its founding universities and strongly reinforced by government action. Created in 1999 by eight Costa Rica universities (both private and public universities that agreed to "adhere" to SINAES) as an agency to provide voluntary accreditation services, SINAES was placed under the National Rector's Council (CONARE). Its governing body, the National Accreditation Council, however, was designated to be the sole authority to control SINAES, to establish the accreditation programs for university careers including creation of standards and processes, and to make all of the accreditation decisions for the agency. The election process for members of the National Accreditation Council (half named by rectors of the public universities and half named by rectors of private universities that "adhere" to SINAES) appears to be well regarded by the higher education community and the public at large. Since 1999 the National Accreditation Council has demonstrated its capacity to provide effective leadership to the organization and to formulate strategies for the agency's growth and advancement.

The public role of SINAES was affirmed in Costa Rica Law No 8256, passed in May 2002, that granted SINAES legal independence and defined it as a "public interest organism" with the mission of accrediting university careers and programs that meet SINAES requirements. The legislature of Costa Rica on February 22, 2010 passed Law No 16.506 that "strengthened" the public policy role of SINAES particularly by creating a dependable source of funding for SINAES and by linking hiring preferences in government positions to graduation from a SINAES accredited career.

SINAES also benefits from a long legal tradition in Costa Rica of separating higher education from potential government interference. Because it is the legal organization for the National Rector's Council, CONARE shares in the protections granted by the government to Costa Rica universities. Since CONARE is the organizational umbrella under which SINAES exists, SINAES also shares in those protections. The team studied carefully the relationships between CONARE and SINAES and concluded that while SINAES uses several of the administrative services provided by CONARE, its ability to fulfill its mission is unhindered by these ties with that organization.

Although the mission of SINAES was defined in 1999 and confirmed by the government in 2002, the National Accreditation Council adopted in September 2005 the following mission statement for the organization:

> To promote the quality of Costa Rica higher education by way of an official accreditation of the academic quality of the diverse institutions, careers and programs that are voluntarily submitted for this purpose by the Costa Rica higher education institutions, both public as well as private, with the intention of reaching a better livelihood for all of the inhabitants of the Republic. In this framework, it is also charged with promoting spaces for the discussion and

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analysis of the education and the society, including elements for academic management, amongst them, new forms of improvement of the quality of institutions, careers and programs, divulging to the national community the advancements in this sense". The SINAES and the accreditation model that it promotes are dynamic, they auto-evaluate themselves and they permanently renew base on the feedback that is provided by the stakeholders of the processes and by the research developed.

The National Accreditation Council has amplified this mission with statements of values and vision, all of which are prominently displayed in the office and made public on the agency's web site. The leadership of the Council over the years appears to have been critical to the breadth of vision of the agency and particularly to the careful attention paid to creating an agency that would have international credibility.

While SINAES is providing a variety of services valuable to universities in Costa Rica, its primary focus is on providing a strong and credible approach to higher education quality assurance for careers that meet global expectations of good practice. To assure its capacity to fulfill this mission, the National Accreditation Council and the staff rely on a variety of evaluation and planning tools that have over the past decade allowed the organization to grow from a very small staff to one of size and diversified competence necessary to support the breadth of the agency's vision and mission. Annual cycles of planning and reporting appear to have contributed significantly to the agency's development. The new demands on the agency that result from Law No. 16.506 will test the responsiveness and flexibility of all of these tools.

The National Accreditation Council is unique in that it meets weekly. Undoubtedly in its earliest years, the Council shared with its very small staff the

basic management of the agency. As it has grown, SINAES has maintained the weekly meetings of the Council even as it has developed a staff capable of managing the agency. Thanks to the weekly schedule, the Council in a timely fashion has met most of its multiple decision-making responsibilities. Some interviews held by the team suggest that even before the increased workload about to strike the agency, the Council role was perceived by some to be a potential bottleneck in the processes now. Whether long processes result from the multiple steps in them or the various steps in them requiring Council decisions, SINAES will need to consider the current role of the Council as it strives for the responsiveness and flexibility the future growth will necessitate.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends SINAES for the clarity and strength of its legal status and for the commitment of those who sit on the National Accreditation Council, particularly for their attention to creating and using internal tools for evaluating the agency and strategizing for its future. As will become clear throughout this report, however, the National Accreditation Council confronts several important strategic decisions to enable SINAES to absorb the new universities wanting to adhere to SINAES and the expectations of all adhering universities to have more of their careers accredited. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on Governance.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 2.
Resources

The EQAA has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The EQAA's resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency.

SINAES has relied on two major streams of revenue: one from its own services and programs from fees set by the National Accreditation Council, and one from the State with some funds coming as a part of the budgetary program of CONARE and some funds transferred by the Ministry of Public Education. The future will be shaped by the more dependable flow of State revenues provided for in Law No. 16.506, for a fixed percentage of the total education budget will go to SINAES rather than the amounts separately negotiated in each budget cycle. SINAES has a well-defined structure of fees that appear to be appropriate to the various services provided. The accreditation processes have several different steps, each of which involves external peer reviewers that are paid for their services. Because the fees for each may or may not always cover the actual costs of the process, the fee structure may require some modification as the demands for services increase. According to conversations with staff that oversee the agency's accounts, careful management has allowed the agency to create a reserve that can provide some flexibility in responding to unanticipated or one-time expenditures.

Over the past few years, for example, SINAES has wrestled with the challenge of developing a more robust information management infrastructure not only to support its processes and contribute to effective public distribution of

information, but also to allow for effective research programs by the agency. Efforts to collaborate with CONARE on this important task have been joined with work with the Argentinean higher education quality assurance agency, CONEAU, as SINAES seeks to create effective technological systems to support its work. This important project inevitably involves significant investments for software and hardware as well as longer-term expenditures in maintaining, modifying and upgrading these critically important systems.

Funding sources over the years have kept pace with the growing needs of the agency. With the exception of 2004 and 2008, annual budget increases were well above 20%, allowing the agency to create a dedicated office area that now houses a staff of thirteen. The offices are in a much larger facility that also houses CONARE, but since there is limited room for physical expansion, SINAES will probably soon need to find other space as it continues to grow.

The staff is well qualified for the current scope of SINAES work, and has an appropriate mix of professionals and administrative support. SINAES also supports some student internships that contribute to its capacity. It appears that SINAES has paid careful attention to the varied goals of the organization as it chose its staff, assuring, for example, staff competencies in research and evaluation of the agency and its work. It also supports professional development opportunities for the staff, both for professional growth and for honing skills important to the agency.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends SINAES for its staff about which it heard uniform

praise from representatives of university programs and peer reviewers. It also

encourages SINAES to move with all reasonable dispatch to create the

technological support that will be of great importance for the efficiencies

necessary to meet the anticipated significant increase in demand for SINAES

services. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully

the Guideline on Resources.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 3.
Quality Assurance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.

The EQAA conducts internal self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data and analysis.

The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

For such a young organization, SINAES has a commendable record of

internal quality review and improvement. It has developed a tested structure

consisting of annual planning and reporting; reflection portions of meetings and

workshops; on-going feedback from programs and peer reviewers that is now

usefully "systematized" through databases. SINAES reports using special self

study processes to measure SINAES against external criteria such as ISO

9001:2000, CCA standards, and INQAAHE good practices.   SINAES's

accreditation with CCA must be reviewed and continued on a five-year cycle,

thus assuring at regular intervals a strong external review of its quality assurance

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endeavors.

Since 2001 the organization has created and then evaluated its achievements through an Annual Institutional Operating Plan (PAO). A SWOT analysis in 2004 started a major strategic planning cycle. Although the PAO is required by the Controller-General of the Republic, SINAES has gone far beyond what the government needs or expects and, in fact, it has been encouraged to provide more succinct and focused progress reports on major strategic goals. It seeks regular feedback from institutions and from advisors, panel members and reviewers of follow-up plans.

The self-study document provided a variety of useful charts and graphs drawn from various agency tools to evaluation parts of its accreditation processes, accreditation standards, and effectiveness of staff support in these activities. Those presentations speak to a high level of satisfaction among multiple constituencies; they also suggested areas open to improvement that SINAES moved to address rather quickly. In fact, the self-study report provided the team with appropriate evidence of self-evaluation followed by strategizing and implementing improvements. This is to an extent where the team wondered whether the agency might even be too quick to implement changes, not giving some processes enough time to really be sufficiently tested.

SINAES reported that CCA asked that its accreditation report not be shared publicly. SINAES was the first agency to receive CCA accreditation; perhaps with more experience CCA will allow for public distribution of its report. One goal of improvements to the organization's web site is to be able to share more easily

key documents related to the agency's internal quality assurance.

The team concluded that SINAES almost from its beginning sought to be an effective learning organization, questioning how well it did its work and making modifications as needed for improvement.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends SINAES for the robustness of its internal quality evaluations and the consistency in its application which is highlighted in feedback from institutions to SINAES, but suggests that the agency may wish to model more fully to its institutions and the public how the agency evaluates itself and implements continuous improvement.   A succinct annual report that measures progress against strategic goals would be useful. The team also has some concern about how well the systems of evaluation will scale as the work of the agency expands in the future. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on EQAA Quality Assurance.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 4.
Reporting Public Information

The EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural context of the EQAA. This includes full and clear disclosures of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.

The EQAA also demonstrates public accountability by reporting its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.

If the external evaluation leads to a decision about the higher education institution or program, the procedures applied and the criteria for decision-making are public, and the criteria for review are transparent, public, and ensure equality of treatment.

The EQAA also discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

Although SINAES staff believe that the agency's web site falls far short of being as useful and effective as it might be, it currently is the public home to almost all of the important documents that define SINAES's accreditation processes, including its procedures and standards. Moreover, it includes lists and links to all "adhering" universities as well as lists of the careers in them that have received SINAES accreditation.

SINAES has been endeavoring to identify the best people in a career or in the university to receive electronic communications about the agency, its programs, processes, and standards. This challenge is almost universal in higher education quality assurance agencies. But SINAES is adding to its complexity by trying to create dependable communication links with non-adhering universities as well. The goal is laudable: find a dependable institutional connection that can oversee appropriate broad distribution within the university of

information regarding SINAES.

In recent years, SINAES has identified other target audiences it wishes to reach in national and international settings. With the help of student interns, the agency has implemented a strategic plan of increased communications with its multiple stakeholders. It supplements this communication strategy with a program of press releases and with important connections to programs aimed at senior year high school students. The communication efforts seem to be bearing fruit, for the team heard from various constituents, particularly students, that within the nation there is a much better understanding of and appreciation for accreditation and SINAES.

At this point, SINAES has chosen not to publish negative accreditation decisions. In part this appears to be driven by the newness of the agency and its programs; in part it is driven by the number of "reconsidered" decisions made by the agency; and in part it is driven by the concern that weaker career programs that could benefit and grow from a "failed" accreditation experience might choose not to risk bad publicity. There is a general sense that Costa Rica is small enough that people in higher education know which careers failed to gain accreditation. But in an era of heightened student interest in the accredited status of a career, particularly in light of Law No. 16.506, SINAES may soon need to reconsider what it makes known to the public about all of its accrediting decisions.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends the agency for the careful attention it has paid to how

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it has "branded" SINAES. It appears that in a very few years, SINAES has

become accepted within Costa Rica as playing a strong leadership role in

bringing attention to the importance quality assurance and quality improvement in

Costa Rica higher education. In light of heightened student interest in being

enrolled in accredited careers, SINAES may need to find ways to share more

fully the results of all of its accreditation activities. The team recommends that

INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on Reporting Public

Information.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 5.
The Relationship Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions

The EQAA:
• recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;
• respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions or programs;
• applies standards or criteria that have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders; and
• aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability of the institution.

Although Law No. 15.506 may make SINAES accreditation of certain

careers less voluntary than in the past, the basic philosophy of the organization

retains the goal of voluntary accreditation set by its founding universities. Its

vision is to be "the national referent of the qualify of institutions, of the careers

and of the programs of higher education in the country." Through accreditation of

careers, it aims to infuse into adhering universities in particular but the nation

more generally, a culture of quality that would contribute to academic excellence

in Costa Rica.

. Perhaps one of the signs of SINAES'S contribution to higher education quality has been the creation and support of the role of Quality Managers in many adhering universities. As with many new quality assurance agencies confronting a very diverse group of universities, SINAES had to create standards and processes that in a sense would teach the methods and strategies of quality improvement even as it sought to establish comparability of quality in careers in Costa Rica. Moreover, in doing this it needed to bridge the differences between academic cultures in public and private universities. Without requiring a specific administrative structure common to accredited careers or to institutions housing them, SINAES has been successful in having several universities institutionalize offices and services necessary for effective self-management of quality

It was unfortunate that an inadvertent scheduling misunderstanding prevented the team from meeting with the rectors of the national universities, but rectors of private universities and Quality Managers from public and private universities testified to the fact that SINAES respects the autonomy of the university and its careers. SINAES defined hallmarks of strong and effective internal quality assurance without dictating a required structure and process. In fact, while the private sector perceives lack of equity within the nation, it agreed that the major problems were not of SINAES's making nor ones SINAES could or should solve. Gaining SINAES accreditation, however, helps to level the competitive playing field.

Perhaps the strongest evidences for this Guideline are two recent processes used by SINAES in developing different accreditation programs. The

first and much larger process involved a recasting of the basic accreditation model.   Ostensibly a revision of the Accreditation Manual, this process started in 2004. It included the hiring of experts who helped develop the new model followed by a vetting of the model with "external stakeholders" that resulted in another iteration of the Manual. The new model includes a variety of questionnaires that also were vetted through university evaluation units. The new model was fully implemented in October 2009, and had been significantly studied, reviewed, and revised during this period. Although some people who met with the team still did not understand the new program clearly, SINAES could document the extensive and inclusive processes it followed, including interactions with experts in some of the careers most likely to seek accreditation.

The second, conducted in 2008, involved several university representatives called together to create a manual for careers being taught through distance education. Through an interchange among institutions and hired experts, the proposals went through various iterations before being accepted by the National Accreditation Council.

There may be a risk that SINAES has developed processes that require it to become too involved in each career's development of quality management. For example, as part of the accreditation process careers develop quality improvement plans; in fact, some final decisions on accreditation rested on the filing of an acceptable improvement plan. SINAES then requires annual reporting on those plans, and in so doing runs the risk of limiting the university autonomy by, in a sense, turning the agency into every accredited career's

academic vice president or provost. In the short run this might prove to be a very

helpful way to nourish a culture of quality but in the long run it turns SINAES into

the manager of quality.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends the agency for the achieving in such short time the

reputation for being the national agency most capable of supporting a culture of

quality in Costa Rica higher education. It counsels the agency, however, to

honor evidence of institutional and career maturation of self-management of

quality by creating flexibility in its follow-up endeavors. The team recommends

that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on The Relationship

Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions.

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INQAAHE GUIDELINE 6. The EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance

The EQAA has documents that indicate clearly what the EQAA expects of the institution. Those expectations (which may for example be called standards or factors or precepts) are appropriate for the core activities of an institution of higher education or program. The standards should explicitly address all areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, such as teaching, learning, research, community work, etc. and necessary resources such as finances, staff/faculty, and learning resources. Standards may refer to specific areas, levels of achievement, relative benchmarking and types of measures, and may provide general guidelines. They may also include specific learning goals.

SINAES only accredits careers within universities. From its inception, the

agency invited the assistance of international experts and it measured its

standards against those used for program accreditation in other national settings.

It published its first Accreditation Manual in May 2000 and issued an Addendum

to the Accreditation Manual in 2003. As mentioned under GGP #5, it has just

published a new Manual that defines the current criteria and processes used by

SINAES to accredit a career.

In the newest accreditation model SINAES has a set of "Admissibility

Criteria" that revolve around "national norms for the functioning of the universities

and their careers" as well as "conditions necessary for the careers to be able to

present their self-study reports to SINAES." Graduation of a cohort is an

example of an admissibility criterion. "Sustainability Criteria" focus more on

quality issues such as capacity for follow-up. Other criteria address the "context"

of the career, the resources that support the program, the educational processes

involved in the program, and the results of the program. The model calls for

three types of information: feedback from participants in the educational

process; information from official documents, records, and databases; and

description of procedures and actions related to the career. SINAES has

provided a group of questionnaires to assure that the various stakeholders in the

career provide useful and consistent input. Although the new model (criteria and

processes) might seem to be significantly more complex than the one it replaced,

several of the institutional representative interviewed by the team claimed that

the explicitness of it made the process easier.

It is fair to say that SINAES brings to its model of accreditation a rigorous

and scholarly approach to evaluation. The self-study speaks of the "scientific

basis of the accreditation and self-study processes," and notes the "scientific

rigor of theories" as a key measure of its approach to quality.   In the latest

revision of the model, this contributed to an overly elaborate conceptual framework that was ultimately streamlined. Nonetheless, the new process continues to include several separate reviews, each meant to "validate" specific components or steps within the process.

SINAES is rich with manuals and guides both for the careers preparing for and hosting an evaluation process and for those people sharing in evaluating the careers and their required improvement plans. Those who use the manuals speak highly of their utility. These documents are available on the agency's web site.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends the care with which SINAES has imbedded into its processes sound and valid approaches to evaluation. It assumes, however, that the agency will discover that accreditation often is as much art as science. As SINAES extends its services to more careers and to more universities, it will learn that there are a vast number of variables, only some of which an agency can reasonably be expected to define in policy and practice. In short, if agency is to honor innovation and experimentation and if it is to respect institutional diversity, it will inevitably adapt its quality assurance processes to effectively encompass these things. Maintaining credibility and consistency while being appropriately adaptive is the art. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on the EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 7.
The EQAA's Requirements on Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA

The documentation concerning self-evaluation explains to the institutions of higher education the purposes, procedures, process and expectations in the self-evaluation process. The documents also include the standards used, the decision criteria, the reporting format, and other information needed by the higher education institution.

Typically, an EQAA review process includes a self-evaluation through self-study by the institution or program, external peer review, and a follow-up procedure.

As necessary and appropriate, the EQAA guides the institution or program in the application of the procedures of the quality assurance process, such as self-evaluation, external review, or solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents.

SINAES has an excellent track record of putting into manuals and other documents full explanations of its "purposes, procedures, process and expectations in the self-evaluation process." It has supplemented those documents with a variety of training programs provided to careers and universities thinking about, preparing for, and undergoing accreditation. The interviews during the site visit also showed that SINAES has been able to engage the students actively in the self-evaluation processes, which is commendable.

Moreover, as part of its ongoing program of quality improvement, SINAES has met with quality units of adhering universities to discuss some of the more complex components of the accreditation standards. In its self-study report, SINAES identified these topics in particular: expectations for research, student advising, degrees held by faculties, calculation of academic loads, and so forth. Some of these matters appear to be more clearly defined or explained in the new

Model and its manuals.

As might be anticipated, some of the manuals, at least according to some quality managers the team interviewed, come close to making accreditation self-study less of a process of self-analysis than one of compiling compliance data. It is inevitable in accreditation processes that faculty, administrators, and even peer reviewers sometime fail to move beyond the provision of required documentation—particularly if such documentation needs to be created specifically for the review—with a thoughtful analysis of the meaning and impact of the documentation.

Although SINAES has several unique intermediate steps in its accreditation process, such as advisors (i.e., readers of the self evaluation reports) and reviewers of follow-up plans, it is founded on the model of self-evaluation, external peer review, and appropriate follow-up after an agency decision. SINAES has manuals for each step of the process and provides useful training for those involved in each step. Unique to the SINAES process is the interjection of a required review of the self-study report by external peer reviewers who can require modifications or even stop the planned evaluation visit. The role of quality improvement plans in the process, both in informing a final decision and constituting a required follow-up, is also somewhat unique to SINAES.

As mentioned earlier, the new Model for Accreditation now implemented by SINAES includes several questionnaires careers will use in gathering evaluative input from a variety of constituencies, including students and employers. With few exceptions, representatives of institutions and careers spoke favorably of

these instruments.

TEAM FINDING

The team commends SINAES for its careful attention to documentation of

discrete process steps even at the risk early in its development of

overemphasizing the compliance aspects of every accrediting process. The

team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES meets fully the Guideline on

The EQAA'S Requirements For Institutional Evaluation And Reporting To The

EQAA

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 8.
The EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program

The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the external evaluation that states the standards used, assessment methods and processes, decision criteria, and other information necessary for external review. The EQAA also has specifications on the characteristics, selection and training of reviewers. The EQAA's system must ensure that each institution or program will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees (together, the "external panels") are different.

The system ensures that:

• The external reviewers meet the EQAA specifications, and the external reviewers are adequate to the tasks to be accomplished.
• External reviewers have no conflicts of interest.
• External reviewers receive necessary training
• External reviewers' reports are evidence-based and clear, with precisely stated conclusions.

When practicable, the EQAA should include at least one external reviewer from another country or jurisdiction in the external panel.

For a variety of very sound reasons, SINAES has structured its

accreditation program around extensive use of international peers. Early on this

assured quality assurance competencies not yet developed within the nation; it

also contributed to credibility of the reviews and subsequent accreditation decisions. Evaluation teams continue to be weighted more toward international than national expertise. But other steps in the process rely heavily on Costa Rica peers and expertise.

SINAES staff members bear considerable responsibility for recruiting, selecting, and training all of the peers. They do so against clearly defined guidelines set by the National Accreditation Council related to credentials and experience expected in peer reviewers. It seems likely that the University of Costa Rica figures prominently in the national corps of peer reviewers, either as the place from which the reviewer graduated or is teaching. But the team noted that several of the peers with whom it talked also had experience in the private sector and/or held other public sector positions relevant to the career under review.

It seems that early in its development, SINAES did some of the training of national peers in groups, but in recent years the national peers have often been trained and oriented through individual meetings with staff. The team notes the agency's commitment to good training, and therefore proposes that it is probably time to return to more group training thereby enabling better use of case studies and/or simulation. It is likely that as the demand for more accreditation processes grows, this kind of efficiency also will be necessary. But even if it modifies training modalities, SINAES should maintain its proven commitment to provide effective training.

National peers comment that the while the use of international peers will

continue to be important in the SINAES process, there remains the on-going challenge of orienting those peers to the national contexts. Because the national peers cannot and should not absorb that responsibility alone, a SINAES staff member, it is thought, needs to be available throughout the on-site visit. This inevitably constitutes a significant commitment of staff time and over the long run may prove to be difficult if not impossible to maintain. Due to the anticipated future workload SINAES will need to experiment with other ways for staff to support a visit and/or create a peer corps of expert site monitors/guides to substitute for staff.

SINAES has created sound policies related to conflict of interest. Moreover, it is able to give examples of when and how those policies have been used either by the agency or by the career to shape and/or reshape a peer team.

SINAES has a series of guides that it uses for the peer steps in its process. It trains to those guides, but they also serve as resources to the peers conducting the visits, reviewing documents, writing the report, and doing the follow up work on improvement plans. SINAES emphasizes through them methodologies of evaluation meant to support fairness and impartiality.

From its inception, SINAES has endeavored to create and manage a quality assurance program that could evaluate careers in different types of institutions consistently and objectively (or, "scientifically"). Although all Costa Rica universities are relatively new, the public universities are longer established and until recently enrolled the majority of students. Now the private sector has grown rapidly and enrolls more than half of the student population. SINAES began as a

voluntary effort to regulate and assure comparative quality of careers provided by these diverse institutions.   From its founding, therefore, SINAES has striven to conduct processes that have the reputation for being fair and impartial. To a significant extent it appears to have succeeded, earning the support of the Minister of Education and key leaders in the public and private higher education sectors. The feedback to SINAES from universities with accredited careers show that this objective to a large extent has been achieved.

TEAM FINDING

The credibility of the peer review process is critical to the success of any higher education quality assurance agency. At this point, SINAES appears to have gained strong credibility for its accreditation. It has to be noted, however, that the processes are lengthy and require considerable involvement of staff and peers. SINAES has robust planning processes and is encouraged to quickly integrate into them the challenge of scaling the existing processes to fit the new demand it will have for its services. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES fully meets the Requirement on The EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program.

INQAAAHE GUIDELINE 9.
Decisions

The EQAA evaluations address both the higher education institution's own self-assessment and external reference points, such as judgments by knowledgeable peers or relevant legislation. An EQAA must be independent, i.e. it has autonomous responsibility for its operations, and its judgments cannot be influenced by third parties. The EQAA's decisions must be impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgments are made by different panels. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

When the EQAA advises the government or other public bodies, the decisions made by each agency should be made as independently as practicable.

From its founding documents through the national legislation supporting it, SINAES has been structured to assure the independence of its decision-making processes. Even though SINAES remains under the CONARE umbrella, The National Accreditation Council functions with complete independence.

Moreover, as already mentioned in this report, SINAES has a significant set of publications and guides that contribute to the transparency of the various steps in its decision-making processes. The requirements and processes related to agency decisions seem to be clearly written and available to institutions, careers, and the public.

Each team reports its recommendations directly to and face-to-face with the National Accreditation Council at the conclusion of an evaluation. This is a unique step in the process, but the team did not perceive that during that oral reporting and listening process the Council unduly influenced the findings that would later come to the Council for action.

The inclusion of a staff/technical report in the materials for the National Accreditation Council constitutes an important effort to bring consistency into decision-making. That report provides the Council with important types of benchmarking information related to similar Council decisions over the years.

In appears to the team, however, that in practice there is the potential for negotiation about decisions. In making the case that the agency is responsive to institutional concerns, SINAES includes in its self-study charts of institutional requests for "reconsideration" of a decision. While each final decision might have been appropriate to the specifics of the situation, it is not clear whether they are exceptions to stated policy or establish a precedent in interpretation and implementation of a policy. Moreover, the team heard in interviews of a few situations where members of the National Accreditation Council met with an institution and/or career to talk over differences related to a decision. In at least one case, a national peer was called upon to explain or defend a decision made as a Reader. Responsiveness and openness to reconsideration is healthy in an agency as long as it follows an agreed-upon set of protocols. While there is no evidence to suggest that the ultimate resolution and decision violated agency policy, there is the potential for such practices to diminish the transparency of the decision-making processes unless clearly defined by protocols.

TEAM FINDING

SiNAES has been scrupulous in attending to the independence of its decisions. In practice, however, it confronts what other agencies always confront: balancing responsiveness with transparency as it makes those

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independent decisions. Every quality assurance agency confronts unique situations that demand something other than a bureaucratic response. SINAES will want to learn from its experiences the kinds of flexibility it needs and then write policies or protocols that enables that flexibility. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES fully meets the Guideline on Decisions.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 10.
Appeals

The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. Appeals should be conducted by reviewers who were not responsible for the original decision and who have no conflict of interest, but appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

As the previous discussion makes clear, SINAES has a process through which a career can request a reconsideration of a decision. However, it does not have the formal policy and process on appeals as anticipated by this Guideline. Nonetheless, the National Accreditation Council's handling of two recent requests for reconsideration suggests that the agency may well be developing an appropriate appeal process in practice. In two situations the Council contracted with "an international evaluating peer" to provide an analysis of the documents related to the request for reconsideration of a decision. In short, the Council involved in the review of the decision a reviewer who had not been involved in the decision. At the time of the team visit, the ultimate resolution of these cases had not happened. Clearly the National Accreditation Council cannot give to any other group its legal decision-making authority, but with an appropriate appeals process, it can assure that when some specific types of decisions are challenged (for example, granting or withdrawing accreditation) it allows for the decision to

be reviewed by uninterested parties and takes their recommendations into

account in responding to the appeal.

TEAM FINDING

The team recommends that SINAES codify the process and procedure it

used in submitting a contested decision to outside peers free of conflict of

interest for review and recommendation. SINAES should consider the use of two

outside peers in this process. This will constitute an appeals process that follows

the letter of the INQAAHE Guideline. The team recommends that INQAAHE

finds that SINAES meets substantially the Guidelines on Appeals.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 11.
Collaboration

The EQAA collaborates with other EQAAs, if possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, review of decisions, provision of transnational education, joint projects, and staff exchanges.

SINAES has a strong record of collaboration. It has signed a variety of

working arrangements with Costa Rica professional associations related to the

careers. Its close, collaborative work with the professional and accrediting

organizations for engineers and architects, CFIA and AAPIA, should be noted.

Instead of replicating the work of the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board

(CEAB), SINAES acknowledged that Board's accreditation of seven careers in

Costa Rica universities. SINAES has signed cooperative agreements with the

Costa Rica Lawyers' Bar and the Journalists' Professional Association of Costa

Rica. The team met with representatives of these groups as well as others from

national organizations for physicians and surgeons, public accountants, and

"licentiates and professors." Each collaboration is unique, but all who met with the team testified that SINAES was the key Costa Rica agency for higher education quality assurance and quality improvement; moreover, all spoke of the effectiveness of various shared programs for addressing professional training and certification needs in Costa Rica. All saw themselves to be important stakeholders in the accreditation standards and processes used by SINAES.

SINAES has taken initiatives to maintain good communication with Costa Rica offices and agencies related to higher education including the Ministry of Public Education, the National Council or Rectors (CONARE), the National Council of Private Higher Education (CONESUP), the National Commission for Educational Loans (CONAPE), and the General Directorate of the Civil Service. Representative of these organizations affirmed the importance of SINAES to the task of improving the quality of higher education in Costa Rica and restated the expectation often heard by the team that students will better served in making educational choices by the existence of SINAES and its accreditation of careers.

As mentioned early in this report, SINAES has shared in the development of higher education quality assurance regionally and internationally. It provides leadership for CCA and was the first agency to win CCA accreditation. It provides leadership, as well, for the Ibero-America Network for the Accreditation of Quality of Higher Education (RIACES) and the President of the Council is the current President of RIACES. It has signed bi-lateral arrangements with the higher education quality assurance agency of Argentina (CONEAU), the National Accreditation Council of Colombia, and Spain (ANECA and AQU). It is a

member of INQAAHE and its leaders have participated in INQAAHE meetings and workshops.

TEAM FINDING

The team makes special commendation for the highly collaborative culture established by SINAES. Not only has this collaboration contributed significantly to its effectiveness and acceptance in Costa Rica, but it also has played a major role in ensuring that SINAES practices meet and often exceed international good practices. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES fully meets the Guidelines on Collaboration.

INQAAHE GUIDELINE 12.
Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies may be the same as those for domestic providers and domestic provision. In formulating its policies and practices, the EQAA should consider relevant guidelines issued by international agencies and other associations. All EQAAs should consult with appropriate local agencies in the exporting or importing countries, although this might not be possible or appropriate in situations such as those involving distance learning or small enrollment.

SINAES does not appear to have specific policies related directly to transnational and cross-border higher education. Its accreditation can be extended to international institutions in Costa Rica, for they must receive formal approval to operate in Costa Rica through CONESUP. Appropriate legal authorization is one of three basic requirements of affiliation with SINAES. The other two requirements relate to institutional capacity and a sound record of fulfilling national regulations. In this regard, the team understands that SINAES

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is open to "imported education" that is delivered on site and it will use exactly the same standards and processes for such careers.

SINAES, however, does not appear to have any policies related to the accreditation of careers offered by international universities in Costa Rica through on-line learning nor to Costa Rica universities delivering careers outside of the nation. The team was told that the special requirements for on-line learning do not address these, but that no Costa Rica on-line programs currently accredited or seeking accreditation are admitting students outside of Costa Rica. In an era where national boundaries often seem irrelevant to international students anxious to get credentials from reputable universities, SINAES would be well advised to study these matters. In an era where joint and dual degree programs proliferate across national borders, SINAES needs to be prepared for the possibility of a career seeking accreditation of a program shared with a university or universities in the Spanish-speaking nations or in the world more generally.

TEAM FINDING

One thing that sets an INQAAHE review apart from other external reviews is the attention it expects to existing and emerging international trends. While Costa Rica might not be as besieged as other nations by legitimate and illegitimate universities offering courses and careers to Costa Rica students, as the nation improves its educational pathways throughout the system, it will be seen as a source of prepared students. And as Costa Rica, in part through the excellent work of SINAES, establishes a stronger reputation for education quality,

students outside of the nation will seek its universities and the careers they provide. Technology very quickly diminishes borders. SINAES should be prepared with policies and procedures to deal openly, consistently, and fairly with these new developments. The team recommends that INQAAHE finds that SINAES substantially meets the Guideline on Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education.

SUMMARY

The team finds SINAES to meet fully ten of INQAAHE's Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance. SINAES substantially meets the remaining two Guidelines, both of which require some additional policies and procedures to codify emerging practices in the agency. The future will provide a major challenge for SINAES because the inevitable growth in demand for its services will tax staffing patterns and office space, will test the efficiency of existing accreditation processes, and will probably require the agency to consider whether by evaluating and accrediting each career it has located its review of educational quality at the best place in a university. But SINAES faces this future because of the strength of what it has achieved in barely more than a decade: a reputation for being the national resource on quality in higher education, a reputation for being fair and objective in its evaluations and decisions, and a reputation for being responsible and responsive thanks to its thorough methods of self-evaluation and its openness to collaboration.

ANNEX 1
INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

SECTION I. THE EQAA: ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND RESOURCES

1. The Governance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the EQAA. The statement explicitly provides that external quality assurance is a major activity of the EQAA, and it requires a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives of the EQAA. There is evidence that the statement of objectives is implemented pursuant to a practical management plan that is linked to EQAA resources. The ownership and governance structure is appropriate for the objectives of the agency.

2. Resources

The EQAA has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The EQAA's resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency.

3. Quality Assurance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.

The EQAA conducts internal self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data and analysis.

The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

4. Reporting Public Information

The EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural context of the EQAA. This includes full and clear disclosures of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.

The EQAA also demonstrates public accountability by reporting its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.

If the external evaluation leads to a decision about the higher education institution or program, the procedures applied and the criteria for decision-making are public, and the criteria for review are transparent, public, and ensure equality of treatment.

The EQAA also discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

SECTION II. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EQAA: RELATIONSHIP, STANDARDS, AND INTERNAL REVIEWS

5. The Relationship Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions

The EQAA:

- recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;
- respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions or programs;
- applies standards or criteria that have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders; and
- aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability of the institution.

6. The EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance

The EQAA has documents that indicate clearly what the EQAA expects of the institution. Those expectations (which may for example be called standards or factors or precepts) are appropriate for the core activities of an institution of higher education or program. The standards should explicitly address all areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, such as teaching, learning, research. community work, etc. and necessary resources such as finances, staff/faculty, and learning resources. Standards may refer to specific areas, levels of achievement, relative benchmarking and types of measures, and may provide general guidelines. They may also include specific learning goals.

7. The EQAA's Requirements Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA

The documentation concerning self-evaluation explains to the institutions of higher education the purposes, procedures, process and expectations in the self-evaluation process. The documents also include the standards used, the decision criteria, the reporting format, and other information needed by the higher education institution.

Typically, an EQAA review process includes a self-evaluation through self-study by the institution or program, external peer review, and a follow-up procedure.

As necessary and appropriate, the EQAA guides the institution or program in the application of the procedures of the quality assurance process, such as self-evaluation, external review, or solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents.

SECTION III. EQAA REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONS: EVALUATION, DECISION, AND APPEALS

8. The EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program

The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the external evaluation that states the standards used, assessment methods and processes, decision criteria, and other information necessary for external review. The EQAA also has specifications on the characteristics, selection and training of reviewers. The EQAA's system must ensure that each institution or program will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees (together, the "external panels") are different.

The system ensures that:

- The external reviewers meet the EQAA specifications, and the external reviewers are adequate to the tasks to be accomplished.
- External reviewers have no conflicts of interest.
- External reviewers receive necessary training
- External reviewers' reports are evidence-based and clear, with precisely stated conclusions.

When practicable, the EQAA should include at least one external reviewer from another country or jurisdiction in the external panel.

9. Decisions

The EQAA evaluations address both the higher education institution's own self-assessment and external reference points, such as judgments by knowledgeable peers or relevant legislation. An EQAA must be independent, i.e. it has autonomous responsibility for its operations, and its judgments cannot be influenced by third parties. The EQAA's decisions must be impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgments are made by different panels. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

When the EQAA advises the government or other public bodies, the decisions made by each agency should be made as independently as practicable.

10. Appeals

The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. Appeals should be conducted by reviewers who were not responsible for the original decision and who have no conflict of interest, but appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

SECTION IV. EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES: COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND TRANSNATIONAL/CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION

11. Collaboration

The EQAA collaborates with other EQAAs, if possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, review of decisions, provision of transnational education, joint projects, and staff exchanges.

12. Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies may be the same as those for domestic providers and domestic provision. In formulating its policies and practices, the EQAA should consider relevant guidelines issued by international agencies and other associations. All EQAAs should consult with appropriate local agencies in the exporting or importing countries, although this might not be possible or appropriate in situations such as those involving distance learning or small enrollment.

ANNEX 2
List of Participants
REVIEW OF SINAES
22-24 March 2010

1-Members of the National Accreditation Council, including the Chair

Lic. Guillermo Vargas Salazar, President

Dra. Sonia Marta Mora Escalante Vice President

MBA. Álvaro Cedeño Gómez

Ph.D Carlos Germán Paniagua Gamboa

MA. Eduardo Ulibarri Bilbao

Lic. Gastón Baudrit Ruiz, Legal Advisor

Dr. Guido Miranda Gutiérrez

Ph.D Juan Manuel Esquivel Alfaro

Ing. Rodolfo Herrera Jiménez

M.Sc. Rosa Adolio Cascante, Executive director

2- SINAES professional staff

M.S.c Paula León Saavedra, Researcher

M.S.c Esteban Arias Monge, Researcher

Lic. José Miguel Rodríguez García, Researcher

M.S.c Juanita Castro Tato, Researcher

Lic. Julio César Oviedo Aguilar, Institutional Communication

Lic. Cynthia Espinoza Prieto, Support to Accreditation Process

Gisela Coto Quintana, Coord. Quality Manager

3- Minister of Education

Dr. Leonardo Garnier Rímolo, Ministry of Education

4- Representatives from professional associations and institutions

Lic. Carmen Fallas Aguilar, Representative (COLPER)
M.Sc. Gustavo Fallas Jiménez, Executive Directo (Contadores Públ),
Olman Ramírez Artavia y Bertalia Chaves, Representatives (COLYPRO)
Patricia Arias Montero, Academic Director (Colegio Abogados)
Dr. Roulan Jiménez Chaves, President (Col Médicos)
Lic. Adrian Blanco Varela, Executive Director (CONAPE)
M.Sc. José Joaquín Arguedas Herrera, President Servicio Civil

5- Staff providing administrative support

M.B.A Pablo Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Administrator
Lic. Jennifer Sequeira Duarte, Secretary
Lic. Karina Salazar Obando, Assistant
Bach. Cindy Vanessa Salgado, Assistant
Dr. Ingeniera Gisela Coto Quintana, Coord. Quality Manager

6- Quality Managers or equivalent with responsibility for the quality assurance portfolio from publicly and private funded universities

MA Ulises Rodríguez Guerrero, Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica

Dr. Javier Cox Alvarado,, Universidad Estatal a Distancia

Flor Cubero Venegas, Universidad para la Paz

Dra. Rosa María Arias, Universidad Laureate Internacional (Latina e Interamericana)

Dra. Virginia Céspedes Gaitán, Universidad de Ciencias Médicas.

Ms. Marcela Hidalgo Solís, Universidad Católica de Costa Rica

M.Sc. Alfonso Villalobos, Universidad Iberoamericana

7- Readers

Sandra Blanco García
Allan Henderson García
Ruth Martínez Cascante
Jeannette Fallas Monge
María Eugenia Herrera Peña
Laura Jiménez Umaña

8- Rectors or senior management representatives from private universities with accreditation experience

MBA. Henry Rodríguez Serrano, Rector, Universidad Interamericana
Pbro. Fernando Muñoz Mora, Rector, Universidad Católica
Ing. Walter Bolaños Quesada, Rector, Universidad Latina
Licda. Rocío Valverde Gallegos, Rector, Universidad Santa Paula
Dr. Pablo Guzmán Stein, Rector UCIMED
Dr. Carlos Gómez Rodas, Vicerrector, Representative, Universidad Libre de Derecho
Dr. Roberto Rodríguez Barquero, Representative, Universidad Iberoamericana
Daniel Sherrard, Representative, EARTH

9- National Peers

Josefa Guzmán León

Juan Calivá Esquivel

Jensy Campos Céspedes

Beatriz Badilla Baltodano, Médicas

Bonnie Kay Brown Gfrorer

Elizabeth Coto

Teodora Tsijli, Distancia

Moisés Hernández

10- Student associations

Ademar Azofeifa Murillo, Enseñanza de la matemática, UNA

Marcelo Sagot Better, Arquitectura, UCR

Johanny Arilexis Pérez Sierra, EARTH

Gregori Arias, Medicina, UCIMED

Carlos Luis Víquez, Informática, UNA

Veronica Delgado, Biotecnología, TEC

Carla Amador, Diseño del Espacio Interno, Veritas

Eilyn Alvarez, Administración de Empresas, Interamericana

Hanzel Zuñiga Valerio, Enseñanza de la religión, U Católica

ANNEX 3
Review Panel Members

- Steve D. Crow, CEO, S.D. Crow & Co, LLC and former President, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, U.S.A (Panel Secretary)

- Gemma Rauret Dalmau, QA Expert, Former Executive of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA)

- Dorte Kristoffersen, QA Consultant and Senior Advisor HKCAAVQ (Panel Chair)