

Quality assessment program of the teaching activity of the higher education faculty staff. A case study

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Abstract

The European Higher Education area has as one of its axes of development the promotion of quality in universities. Within this framework, the assessment of the quality of the teaching staff is highly recommended. With this aim the Teaching Evaluation Support Programme (DOCENTIA) promoted by Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) is designed to satisfy the needs of the higher education system for a model and procedures to guarantee the quality of the teaching activity while fostering its development and recognition. Currently, more than 90% of the Spanish universities participate in this program, throughout its different phases. This paper presents this program, explains how it is being implemented at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV, Spain), and provides the proposed amendments by the evaluation commission during the follow-up verification phase that must be justified and solved during the monitoring phase, which is currently in progress, to obtain the certification.

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1. Introduction

In the European panorama of Higher Education there has been a decided commitment to improve the quality of the programs and titles offered by each university. In the current context, universities are assuming more and more responsibility in the recruitment and appointment procedures of their teaching staff. Moreover, the current legislation entails a mandatory evaluation of academic, research and management activities carried out by the faculty staff. Consequently, universities must develop procedures for the assessment of the teachers' performance, training, development, and recognition, thus guaranteeing their qualification and teaching competence. Such guidelines must establish clear, transparent, and fair processes of the teaching evaluation activities; opportunities for professional development; and promote intellectual activity and innovation in teaching methods.

The evaluation of the teaching activity must consider the new reality in higher education caused by the COVID19 pandemic, the emergence of hybrid (face-to-face/online) and virtual teaching, and how digital technologies has transformed the learning process in higher education. This change of scenery has led to the need for a pedagogical innovation, an adaptation of the procedures and structures of the institutions and a fluid relationship between the members of the university community. Specifically, remote teaching and open educational resources have become commonplace, even in face-to-face universities, thus facing a great challenge given the need to provide adequate responses to the expectations of its members (Đurišová et al., 2015; Fajčíková and Fejfarová, 2019).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents the Support Program for the Evaluation of the Teaching Activity of University Professors (DOCENTIA) promoted by the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA); section 3 illustrates how this program is implemented at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV, Spain); while section 4 provides the conclusions.

2. Quality assessment program of the teaching activity of higher education faculty staff

The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), created in 2002, is the authorised agency of the Spanish government whose aim is to provide external quality assurance for the higher education system and to contribute to its constant improvement by means of evaluation, certification, and accreditation. It has the status of autonomous agency, and it is a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA). It is intended to promote an integrated, comprehensive, and pertinent system of recognition and accreditation of teaching quality using internationally applied procedures and evaluation criteria.

In the current order of the Spanish university system, the guarantee of the training and competence of the teaching staff rests with the universities and, consequently, they must develop procedures for the assessment of their performance guaranteeing their qualification and teaching competence.

To favour this evaluation of teaching, ANECA launched in 2007 in close coordination with the regional evaluation agencies, the Support Program for the Evaluation of the Teaching Activity of University Professors (DOCENTIA) with the aim of supporting universities in the design of its own mechanisms to manage the quality of the teaching activity of university teaching staff and favour its development and recognition.

This program takes as a reference the recommendations for quality assurance in higher education institutions, contained in the document Criteria and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015), which was approved by the Conference of Ministers signatories of the Bologna Declaration in May 2015. Likewise, in the design of the program, the standards established by internationally recognized organizations in the field of personnel evaluation have been taken into account, such as The Personnel Evaluation Standards, prepared by The Joint Committee of Standards for Educational Evaluation.

The current implementation situation of the program in the context of higher education and the weaknesses and strengths detected in the different existing evaluation models, together with the changes in the profile of the teaching staff of the institutions have served as a stimulus to carry out an in-depth review of the criteria, documentation, and procedures of the evaluation program. The program indicates that the role of teachers is essential for students to achieve a high-quality experience in acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities. The diversity of the student body and a focus with greater emphasis on learning outcomes require a student-centered teaching-learning process and, therefore, changes are also needed in the role of teachers. On the other hand, the evaluation procedure is developed in accordance with the provisions of Spanish legislation for the accreditation of university education leading to official Spanish bachelor's and master's degrees. This regulation establishes the need for a quality assurance system for the degree, the institution, or the university. Moreover, this program responds to the requirements of current legislation on the obligation to evaluate the teaching, research, and management activities of the teaching staff. It should be noted the great experience of the authors of this article in all these areas (teaching, research, and management activities), which reinforce their knowledge to contribute to the quality assessment program of the teaching activity of higher education faculty staff. For instance, each author has more than twenty years of teaching experience and regarding the research they accumulate hundreds of conference proceedings and journal articles published.

As a result, the main objective is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of teaching and, in this way, to contribute to the improvement of the learning results of the student body. Its mission, vision and specific objectives are as follows (ANECA, 2021):

- Mission: to help and support the evaluation of teaching activity and the professional development of teachers in the university system.
- Vision: that higher education institutions own a certified model for evaluating the teaching activity of their faculty that is appropriate, useful, feasible and accurate, and that it is aligned with a teacher professional development framework aimed at excellence in teaching.
- Objectives:

- Improving the quality of university teaching.
- Provide a reference framework that supports higher education institutions in the design and application of their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their faculty, as well as aligning the evaluation of teaching activity with the quality assurance criteria of university degrees.
- Foster the development of teaching staff, their personal and professional promotion, so that they can offer a better service to society, and individually support teachers by providing them with contrasting evidence about their teaching activity, so that they are considered in their professional career.
- Promote the decision-making process related to evaluation, which affects different elements in the policy and management of human resources in universities and the professional development of teachers.
- Contribute to the evaluation of teaching activity from the respect and empowerment of their autonomy.
- Contribute to balancing the significance between teaching, research, and transfer of knowledge as part of the professional development of teachers.
- Support the exchange of experiences between universities for the continuous improvement of teaching activity.
- Be a tool for aligning the quality of the teaching activity with the objectives of the institution.

At this moment, 77 Spanish universities (more than 90%) voluntarily participate in the DOCENTIA Program, throughout different phases, which encompass:

- Phase I: Design: universities design the evaluation procedure of the teaching activity according to the DOCENTIA model and sends it to the Agency for evaluation.
- Phase II: External evaluation of the designs: the model sent to the Agency is evaluated. The purpose of this phase is to recognize compliance with the specifications and criteria of the DOCENTIA model.
- Phase III: Implementation monitoring: ANECA, regional agencies and universities, based on the experience acquired, will review the evaluation model and procedures and, if needed, improve them. Then the universities whose designs have been positively evaluated start the implementation and send an annual report to the Agency.
- Phase IV: Certification and certification monitoring: once the design has been fully implemented and the monitoring phase has been successfully completed, the universities will be able to apply for certification of their evaluation procedures. This certification will be carried out by ANECA or the Regional Agency, thus guaranteeing the results. Once the implementation has been certified, the university must send an annual certification monitoring report. A positive certification is valid for 5 years and entails that it complies with the guidelines and specifications of the DOCENTIA Program.

The evaluation models designed by higher education institutions must, in any case, be articulated around at least three main axes: strategic, methodological and results axis. Currently, around 20 universities are certified. In essence, these three axes refer to why universities carry out an evaluation of the teaching activity, how they perform this evaluation and what consequences will derive from that process (Table 1).

Table 1. Main axes for the quality evaluation of the teaching activity. Source: ANECA, 2021.

I. Strategic axis of the evaluation	
A	Basis and objectives of teaching evaluation
01	Faculty staff professional development framework
02	Model of teaching excellence.
03	Purposes and consequences of teacher evaluation.
04	Scope of application of teacher evaluation.
05	Voluntariness/Obligatory nature of the teaching evaluation according to the teaching staff profile.
06	Frequency of teaching evaluation.
07	Dissemination of the evaluation process of teaching activity.
II. Methodological axis of the evaluation	
B	Dimensions, criteria, and sources for collecting information
08	Dimensions of the evaluation of the teaching activity (object of evaluation).
09	Evaluation criteria.
10	Information collection sources and procedures.
C	Procedure of the university to carry out the evaluation of the quality of the teaching activity
11	Evaluation committees.
12	Procedure for the development of the evaluation.
III. Axis results of teaching evaluation, review, and improvement	
D	Evaluation results and dissemination procedure
13	Teaching evaluation results: evaluation categories.
14	Procedure for the dissemination of the results of the teaching evaluation: the evaluation reports and the reports of results.
E	University procedure for making decisions derived from the evaluation of teaching activity
15	Procedure for making decisions derived from teaching evaluation.
16	Procedure for monitoring the actions derived from the teaching evaluation.
F	Review and improvement of the teaching activity evaluation process
17	Systematic process for reviewing and improving the evaluation procedure of teaching activity.

The dimensions and subdimensions of the DOCENTIA model cover (UPV, 2023):

- Dimension 1: Planning and teaching development:
 - Organization and coordination of teachers
 - Modalities of organization of teaching
 - Coordination of teaching actions
 - Teaching and learning planning
 - Course syllabus
 - Learning outcomes

- Learning and training activities
 - Evaluation criteria and methods
 - Materials and resources for teaching
- Dimension 2: Learning results:
 - Training objectives achieved
 - Training and innovation
 - Review and improvement
 - Dimension 3: Teaching development:
 - Teaching and learning activities
 - Applied evaluation procedures

The first two dimensions focus mainly on the teaching-learning process in the classroom, while dimension 3 of teaching development collects and evaluates all those complementary teaching actions that allow and facilitate the teacher to develop the necessary skills to be able to cover and promote the different teaching profiles and activities at the university.

The incorporation of dimension 1 is the main novelty compared to the previous DOCENTIA_UPV model. This dimension is structured through five standards focused mainly on aspects related to the planning and development of teaching. Both the conceptualization and the definition of the evaluation criteria of this dimension, through indicators and evaluation rubrics, guide the teacher in the progression and advancement of teaching development in the classroom. On the one hand, the determination of the degree of achievement of each standard makes it possible to know the state of the teaching development. On the other hand, the evaluation rubrics guide the actions towards the completion of the different specifications that define each of the standards. The most representative sources of information for this dimension come from the teachers who provides information on how they plan and develop their teaching and from the students who give their opinion on the satisfaction in the development of each of the standards of the model. Student opinion comes from the information from each of the questions in the current student opinion survey and is incorporated into the model in the corresponding standard. In addition, the teacher's opinion is collected through their self-assessment using evaluation rubrics.

Dimension 2 (learning results) is structured around two standards, such that one collects the general results of the teacher's development through indicators of academic performance and the opinions of general satisfaction of the teacher, and another collects the reflection on the achievements and the review and improvement of the teaching work.

Dimension 3 (teaching development) is structured around seven standards and includes all those complementary actions that allow and facilitate the teacher to develop the necessary skills to be able to cover the different teaching profiles that support and promote teaching at the UPV and that give them a broader vision of teaching:

- Training as a key element for improvement.
- Tutoring for both students and teachers, which helps to structure and relate concepts and to adopt a more holistic

vision of knowledge.

- Establishing relationships with the environment, which provide the vision of the application of the knowledge and allows knowing and responding to training needs.
- Internationalization of teaching, which brings closer to different teaching perspectives and facilitates "learning from others".
- Development of teaching innovations, that allows deepening and advancing new teaching concepts.
- Assumption of teaching and leadership responsibilities, actions that, ultimately, allow the teacher to develop a set of communication skills and competencies, synthesis, relationship, teamwork, leadership, motivation, and coordination, among others, that result directly and indirectly in the quality of university teaching and that are aligned with the strategic plan of the UPV.

The academic activity index (IAD) is an index that has made it possible to evaluate the teaching staff of the UPV in recent years. It has been fully incorporated into the new DOCENTIA_UPV model in dimension 3 of Teaching Development, including other teaching activities not previously considered and with a new arrangement of the indicators, which meet seven quality standards derived from the academic activity model. teaching excellence and the professional development framework of the new proposal.

The evaluation models to assess the dimensions of teaching must contemplate, at least, the general criteria presented below, which are based on a series of indicators, thresholds, and references, both qualitative and quantitative:

- Adequacy: the teaching activity must respond to the requirements established by the universities and centers in relation to the organization, planning, development of teaching and the evaluation of student learning, in accordance with the model of excellence and the levels of teacher professional development.
- Satisfaction: the models and procedures for evaluating teaching activity must have legitimacy and acceptance among the agents involved in teaching, especially among students, teachers, and academic managers.
- Efficiency: the teaching activity through an efficient use of the resources made available to teachers, must foster the development of students' skills and the achievement of expected learning outcomes.
- Professionalization: the evaluation must contribute to the improvement of the teacher performance, so that the progress in the teaching career is the reflection of an effective change in the quality of such performance.
- Orientation towards teaching innovation: the teaching activity must be approached from a reflection on the teaching practice itself that favours the teaching staff learning through self-training or training regulated by other instances.
- Orientation to continuous improvement: the evaluation models must incorporate mechanisms that allow the updating and continuous improvement of the model itself and its procedures to adapt to the passage of time.

The dimensions to be evaluated cover planning (i.e., the choice of subjects, the course syllabus and teaching coordination), development (i.e., data on teaching and learning activities and the evaluation procedures), and results (i.e., information on the extent to which students achieve educational objectives and, on the review, and improvement of teaching activities) of the faculty staff. The sources and procedures for collecting the information used for the evaluation of teachers must ensure the quality of such information. They must be based on self-reports provided by the teacher or an

interview to evaluate their performance; a report prepared by the academic managers; and student surveys that consider the representativeness and adequacy of the information provided, as well as the control of possible biases and distortions of such information. In addition, collected information should avoid possible biases by contrasting such information; should make use of viable and sustainable sources and forms of evaluation; and should be based on the interaction with the evaluated teachers. Furthermore, they should consider the achievement of students' training objectives; a review and improvement of teaching activity (e.g., deficiencies detected, comprehension difficulties, lack of teaching skills, poor forecasting of the estimated time for the development of activities, etc.); and basic indicators of the subjects (e.g., the student success rates and their academic performance).

The evaluation models for teaching activity must define the composition of the evaluation committees and the criteria for designation and appointment of their members, aiming to achieve an adequacy of their composition, size, and representativeness of all the agents involved (i.e., teachers, students...). The competence and independence of the evaluators must be considered, as well as the training they should receive. To avoid conflicts of interest, the university may allow external evaluators from other universities to join the commissions.

The functions, rules, and protocols of the members of evaluation committees must be established, as well as the mechanisms for reviewing their work, indicating the people responsible of such review, to guarantee that their performance conforms to the evaluation criteria.

The program should also provide the time invested by the teaching staff, managers and people who evaluate in the process; the material and technical resources that the evaluation processes may require (e.g., evaluation platforms, information management systems, etc); and in order to guarantee the agility and efficiency of the process the evaluation should avoid excessive complexity and bureaucratization.

The results of the teaching activity evaluations of the different universities must be comparable. To this end, the evaluation models will establish, at least, four categories to justifiably group the teaching staff based on the quality of their performance. These categories will have to be discriminating and conform to the following descriptions:

- Excellent performance or A: the quality of the teaching activity performance, beyond being remarkable, must be a benchmark for the university, due to the methodology used, the innovations made, their teaching publications, etc.
- Remarkable performance or B: the quality of the teachers' performance should stand out, either for the quality of their innovations, the results achieved by their students, the assessment made of it by the responsible academics or their students, etc.
- Acceptable performance or C: the performance of the teaching activity is sufficient but there are aspects of improvement in some of the different aspects evaluated.
- Insufficient or deficient performance or D: when the teacher does not adequately fulfil their teaching obligations; when the reports of the academic managers are unfavourable and the evaluations of their performance based on students' surveys are low, or when there is no reflection aimed at improvement in the self-report.

Additionally, the evaluation of teaching activity and the procedures associated with it must be transparent, easily

accessible, visible, and understandable for the entire university community and for society in general. Universities must have a follow-up and continuous improvement plan in accordance with the evaluation results of the teaching activity. This procedure will have to be supported by evidence, including the results of the evaluations, the degree of satisfaction of the agents involved with the evaluation model, etc.

3. Experiences from a case study

In order to respond to the quality assessment of the teaching activity of the university faculty staff, the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV, Spain) decided to participate in the DOCENTIA program (Support Program for the Evaluation of Teaching Activity) of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) (UPV, 2023). UPV has an extensive experience in teacher evaluation, which cover the student opinion survey for each teacher of each subject; the evaluation of teaching merits (five-year terms), which have been carried out since the end of the 1980s; and with the participation in previous pilot project of the teacher training plan evaluation programs granted by ANECA (UPV, 2014). In fact, the UPV was the first public university in Spain to obtain implementation certification in 2012. The UPV has also developed an institutional project of transversal competences (UPV, 2020), on which the implementation of the DOCENTIA program at the UPV has also been based. The objective of this project is to move towards training models that ensure that students acquire the necessary skills to be able to have an adequate labour insertion.

Several actors are involved in this program, which cover ANECA, external recognized evaluators in order to safeguard the appearance of conflicts of interest, university commissions, teachers, and alumni.

Currently, the implementation of the DOCENTIA Program at UPV is in the monitoring phase. This means that once the evaluation model for teaching activity has been verified, the university will implement it for at least two years, on an experimental basis. In this implementation period, the university will adopt decisions related to the training, innovation, and recognition of the teaching staff, which they have established in their models, in accordance with the results of the evaluations they carry out. The primary purpose of this phase is for the universities, supported by the quality agencies, to implement the favourably informed designs and, likewise, to be able to introduce adjustments and improvements to their evaluation models according to the demands and needs of the application context. In short:

- ANECA and the regional agencies monitor the implementation of the verified models.
- The university sends the report corresponding to the implementation of each call.
- The university incorporates the improvements proposed by ANECA and the regional agencies and those detected internally.

In the process of adaptation to the evaluation of the quality of the teaching activity, the UPV presented the first proposal of the DOCENTIA model to academic managers, faculty, union representatives, and students. Afterwards, this model has gone through a review and debate process open to the entire university community that has led to the restructuring of the initial proposal. This is due to the need to adapt the model according to the indications of the last evaluation report on the implementation of the model for evaluating the quality of the teaching activity sent by ANECA in

2021. During the preparation process, three work groups have been created: the first one is open to the entire university community through work groups with the participation of 55 professors, a second more specific work group, made up of 7 people, for the development of quality standards and criteria, and a third group, the Technical Committee, made up of union representatives, center directors, department directors and students. Likewise, work has been done in coordination with the different Vice Chancellors.

The proposal for the new model broadens, restructures, and completely updates the previous model, based on the academic activity index (IAD). This model is defined through fourteen quality standards (S), derived from the excellence model, and aligned with the university strategic plan:

- Standard (S1): Coordination and compliance
- Standard (S2): Organized and clear teaching
- Standard (S3): Motivating and dialogue teaching
- Standard (S4): Active Teaching-Learning process centered on the student
- Standard (S5): Coherent and formative evaluation.
- Standard (S6): Training results
- Standard (S7): Reflection and improvement
- Standard (S8): Teaching practice
- Standard (S9): Continuous training
- Standard (S10): Accompaniment/tutoring
- Standard (S11): Approach to the environment
- Standard (S12): Internationalization of teaching
- Standard (S13): Innovation and improvement
- Standard (S14): Responsibility and leadership

These standards and their respective indicators will guide teachers in the development of their teaching activity. The extension also incorporates new qualitative indicators focused on teaching work in the classroom, which include opinion and the reflection of the teaching staff, as well as the opinion of the student based on the satisfaction surveys. Likewise, it includes the evaluation of other teaching activities that promote overall quality of teaching at the UPV and reinforce the different strategic lines of the institution.

The standards structure is created with the aim of evidencing the development of teacher competencies and facilitating their evaluation through the instruments and sources of information required by the ANECA Teaching Program (teacher, students, and academic managers). The evaluation of each one of the standards indicates the level of development of its achievement, which allows to define specific improvement objectives focused on each standard and guide the teacher in their professional development through the set of plans, programs, resources, and specific teaching training catalogue.

The DOCENTIA model as implemented in UPV has been also structured in three dimensions (UPV, 2023): teaching planning and development, learning results and teaching development. The first two dimensions focus mainly on the

teaching-learning process in the classroom, while dimension 3 of teacher development collects and evaluates all those complementary teaching actions that allow and facilitate the teacher to develop the necessary skills to be able to cover the different profiles. teachers who support and promote teaching at the UPV and who give him a broader vision of teaching.

With the self-assessment teachers can reflect the characteristics of the planning and teaching development that are not included in other indicators of the model, as well as a reflection towards teacher improvement. For the self-assessment the teacher is required to select the subject that he considers most representative of their teaching from among those that have student satisfaction surveys. The selection of the subject must be motivated so that the justification includes the following aspects:

- Key reasons that have conditioned the choice of the subject.
- Mastery of the subject to be taught (experience/knowledge).
- Participation in the design and preparation of the subject.
- Previous experience in teaching the subject or similar subjects.
- Affinity of the subject with their teaching, transfer and/or researcher profile.
- Any other aspect that teachers consider interesting to highlight.

Eventually, in this phase some conclusions have been drawn regarding the improvements to incorporate necessarily:

- It is necessary to develop and apply a teacher professional development framework for its teaching staff that guides the evaluation of teaching activity.
- The Teaching Excellence Award should be reviewed so that it is configured as a true model of teaching excellence.
- The teaching activity evaluation model must be reviewed so that the deficiencies detected during the follow-up verification phase and the implementation monitoring phase are incorporated. They comprise self-reports, satisfaction surveys for students and other agents, transparency, information on the consequences of the model, qualitative final reports, etc.

Some recommendations have also been proposed:

- The adoption of measures that respond to the requirements of the 2012 Certification Report.
- Review of the merits that make up the indicators, especially the teaching activity index (IAD).
- The follow-up of the individual improvement plans adjusted to the training needs and development of the teaching staff.

Therefore, the commission considers that the UPV must undertake an in-depth review of its evaluation model and implement the changes that derive from it, at least during one academic year. After such implementation, the university must submit a follow-up report that includes, among others, the modifications introduced in the model, the response rate to the surveys and satisfaction questionnaires, the evidence on the consequences derived from the evaluation and the results achieved with the evaluation.

After the monitoring phase, the UPV will be enabled to be certified, for which the evaluation models must necessarily meet

the following requirements:

- Having passed the implementation monitoring phase with a favorable report. And, where appropriate, justify the implementation of the improvements that may have been indicated in this phase.
- Having evaluated at least 30% of the teaching staff likely to be evaluated. This teaching staff, in addition, must be sufficiently representative of the different figures, types, etc. of the teaching staff.
- Have a favorable certification report from the Evaluation Commission.

This favorable report will require the university to comply with the requirements established in the framework for the evaluation of the teaching activity of the DOCENTIA Program, especially those related to guaranteeing:

- The reliability of the assessments carried out.
- The transparency and sustainability of the process.
- The discrimination capacity of the evaluation model.
- That the consequences derived from its application affect the improvement of the quality of teaching at the university.
- The satisfaction of the different agents involved.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The Spanish quality assessment program of the teaching activity of higher education faculty staff has been presented. This program, named as the DOCENTIA program, is designed by The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and developed in collaboration with regional quality agencies, provides a comprehensive framework that allows Spanish universities to develop their own evaluation models for teaching activity, thus responding to the need to comply with the current regulations and with the guidelines set in the European Higher Education Area in terms of quality of higher education institutions. Currently, more than 90% of the Spanish universities participate in this program, throughout its different phases.

A particular implementation of this program at the UPV has been presented, which collects the elements and specifications established by the program and contextualizes the evaluation of the teaching activity in the specific environment of this university and its quality policies. It has also been explained how the different agents involved are successfully implementing this program at the UPV. This program is currently in the certification monitoring phase in which an annual follow-up of the evaluation of the teaching activity is being carried out. In addition, the proposed corrective actions to obtain the certification are provided. Furthermore, the designed model has been proved to favour the efficiency, transparency, objectivity, discriminating capacity and fairness of teachers' activity evaluation process.

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