



Quality Assurance in Education

Emerald Article: Accreditation in higher education in Chile: results and consequences

Óscar Espinoza, Luis Eduardo González

Article information:

To cite this document: Óscar Espinoza, Luis Eduardo González, (2013), "Accreditation in higher education in Chile: results and consequences", Quality Assurance in Education, Vol. 21 Iss: 1 pp. 20 - 38

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09684881311293043>

Downloaded on: 22-01-2013

References: This document contains references to 37 other documents

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by Emerald Author Access

For Authors:

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service.

Information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

With over forty years' experience, Emerald Group Publishing is a leading independent publisher of global research with impact in business, society, public policy and education. In total, Emerald publishes over 275 journals and more than 130 book series, as well as an extensive range of online products and services. Emerald is both COUNTER 3 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.



Accreditation in higher education in Chile: results and consequences

Óscar Espinoza

*Center of Educational Research, University Ucinf,
Santiago, Chile, and Center of Comparative Education Policies,
University Diego Portales, Santiago, Chile, and*

Luis Eduardo González

*CINDA, Santiago, Chile, and Center of Educational Research,
University Ucinf, Santiago, Chile*

Received 11 July 2012
Revised 8 October 2012
Accepted 9 October 2012

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyze and discuss the results that the accreditation system implemented in Chile has brought to higher education institutions and undergraduate and graduate programs, taking into account both its positive and negative implications.

Design/methodology/approach – The examination of the Chilean accreditation regime relies on descriptive statistics based on official data from several sources.

Findings – It appears that the Chilean accreditation regime has helped to establish permanent procedures for quality assurance in higher education institutions which has resulted in improving its internal processes, but still the system faces a series of challenges that have to be addressed in order to improve the higher education system as a whole.

Originality/value – The Chilean accreditation experience is placed within the discussion and context of accreditation systems around the world, and lessons which can be relevant to other countries are drawn.

Keywords Institutional accreditation, Program accreditation, Quality assurance, Undergraduate studies, Graduate studies, Chile, Higher education

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

Studies show that there are a set of common factors that significantly affect the development of tertiary education systems such as the growth and diversification of higher education, the introduction of competition and market logic in the sector (Teixeira, 2006), the need to respond to the demands of globalization (Woodhouse, 2006), the technological innovation and the rapid change of knowledge (Becker and Round, 2009; Brennan and Shah, 2000; El-Khawas *et al.*, 1998; Harvey, 2002; Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995).

In this context of transformation, the modern university faces the challenge of adjusting to a complex world with new demands for professions and skills associated with the knowledge society. To this there has to be added new tasks, such as knowledge management and greater demands for accountability and efficiency (Neu



et al., 2008). To successfully meet these important challenges, it is fundamental that universities' governing bodies have good relations with the academic community in general in order to provide a satisfactory academic environment and give value-added to the students' experience, along with permitting the development of an appropriate curriculum and relevant research, a continuous evaluation of its processes, and finally respond to the social and productive needs of its environment (Cifuentes and Landoni, 2011).

Nowadays, the new technological changes associated with the knowledge society have increased the value of education. Rodríguez and Wilson (2000) argued that, due to the particular synergies between technology and human capital, high levels of education may be a necessary condition for technological innovation and adaptation. Therefore, there is a greater interest among the population for higher education, which is expressed in a growing demand for tertiary studies. This happens in a context of vegetative growth of the population with complete secondary education. This new reality has encouraged the emergence of a heterogeneous higher education supply from the private sector with very diverse academic quality, which certainly demonstrates the need for the implementation of quality assurance systems (UNESCO, 2009).

Consistent with the above, in Latin America, the student population and the number of higher education institutions have rapidly increased. Latin America's student population has grown from around 300,000 in 1950 to 20 million today. More than half of this student body attends private institutions. The number of higher education institutions has increased, in the same period, from 75 to 3,000. Of these higher education institutions, today almost two-thirds are private (Espinoza *et al.*, 2006). This new scenario has raised the question about how to assure the quality of both the traditional Latin American higher education institutions and particularly of those recently created ones, which is especially important in a region that requires professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to push for the development of these countries.

Certainly the last two decades have witnessed the need to develop mechanisms and tools in order to improve and ensure the quality of higher education institutions, professional careers and programs such that:

- there are guarantees to society about the provision of minimum standards of educational opportunities and adequate employment performance of graduates;
- there is suitable and sufficient information to make good choices;
- users' demands are satisfied; and
- there are mechanisms for higher education institutions to account for what they do (Neu *et al.*, 2008; Storen and Aamodt, 2010).

The importance of this to Latin America is given by the great number of private higher education institutions existing today in the region, many of which do not pursue the common good, but rather work only according to market principles. The latter has resulted in situations of oversupply of graduates in certain careers and in academic quality deficiencies, among other things.

The methods of quality assurance developed in both Latin America and Europe have been shaped to the needs and characteristics of their higher education systems, with very diverse approaches. However there are common characteristics that

determine their design, development and implementation. These differences result from the functions and goals assigned to quality assessments, their methodological frameworks and the use to which the results are put (Gvaramadze, 2008; Pires and Lemaitre, 2008).

At the beginning of the 1990s there were eight countries with quality assurance procedures, although there were 70 countries that were members of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). In the US the process began with the accreditation of medicine, then licensing, institutional accreditation and accreditation of other professional careers. In Western Europe the emphasis was placed on the initial stages of the process (Holland, Scandinavian countries, the UK). In Eastern Europe accreditation began after the fall of the Berlin wall. A few years later the European Union decided to push accreditation and charged the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) with the design of standards and policy direction (Lemaitre, 2007). In Latin America, the process began with a variety of models resulting in a high degree of heterogeneity in countries where there are established systems, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica and El Salvador. In other countries like Paraguay, Ecuador, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia, Panama and Nicaragua there is a nascent development happening. Finally, some countries in the region such as Venezuela and Honduras have no quality systems.

The Latin American systems tend to be complicated and include licensing, evaluation and accreditation of new higher education institutions, professional careers and graduate programs. In some countries the quality assurance processes are run by different kinds of independent agencies: public (Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Puerto Rico); governmental (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay); private (Chile and Puerto Rico); and agencies that belong to the higher education institutions themselves (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay).

In the case of Chile, although the implementation of the accreditation regime is legally voluntary, in practice it has stimulated the higher education institutions to conduct self-evaluations and when accredited they can access both competitive and student credit funds. This regime applies to both public and private institutions (Espinoza, 2010)[1].

Based on these antecedents, this article analyzes and discusses the results that the accreditation system implemented in Chile has brought to higher education institutions and undergraduate and graduate programs, considering both its positive and negative implications. In particular, this paper examines the way in which Chile has faced the demand for greater quality in its higher education system. The Chilean accreditation experience is placed within the discussion and context of accreditation systems around the world, and lessons which can be relevant to other countries are drawn. The topic of accreditation has acquired growing importance in Chile nowadays as a result of a situation where Chilean students have taken the streets of the main cities of the country to demand quality in the higher education system.

This examination of the Chilean accreditation regime relies on descriptive statistics based on official data from the National Accreditation Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, CNA*), the National Education Council (*Consejo Nacional de Educación, CSE*) and the Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación,*

MINEDUC). It is supplemented by valuable systemic secondary data found in the different MINEDUC publications such as the Higher Education Compendium (*Compendio de Educación Superior*) and INDICES.

2. The higher education system in Chile

2.1 The 1981 reform

The Chilean higher education system was drastically reformed with the legislation of 1980 and 1981 from a system of eight universities financed by the State (two public and six private) to a diversified system with four types of institutions: universities, professional institutes, technical training centers (*centros de formación técnica*) and the higher education institutes of the armed forces and police (*Fuerzas Armadas y de Orden*).

The legislation permitted the creation of private institutions. As a result there are two great legal distinctions among the civilian higher education institutions. On one hand, universities can be state or private and all must be incorporated as non-profit institutions while the professional institutes (IP) and technical training centers (CFT) can be for-profit. The granting of awards – bachelor, licentiate (*licenciado*), master and doctor – is reserved for universities only as well as professional titles that require an academic qualification[2]. Professional institutes can only grant professional titles that do not require a previous academic qualification. Finally, the technical training centers can only grant technical titles (Espinoza *et al.*, 2006).

Universities can be distinguished by those that receive funds directly from the state – and which make up the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (*Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas, CRUCH*) – and those that are self-financed. The former are those State and private universities that existed before the 1981 reform or that derived from them as independent institutions after this year. CRUCH universities are more selective than other institutions since they demand higher scores in the university admission test (*Prueba de Selección Universitaria, PSU*), which is the process used for student selection in Chile.

2.2 Characteristics of the Chilean higher education system

As Table I shows, the total number of higher education institutions has declined in the last two decades from 302 to 176. This decrease is explained by the reduction in the number of professional institutes (from 81 to 43) between the years 1990 and 2010, but

Institutional category	1990	2000	2010
State universities (CRUCH)	14	16	16
Private universities (CRUCH) ^b	6	9	9
New private universities	40	39	35
Professional institutes (private)	81 ^a	60	43
Technical training centers (private)	161	116	73
Total	302	240	176

Notes: ^aIncludes two state institutions; ^bPrivate CRUCH universities are those that receive direct public subsidy. They are similar to state universities

Source: MINEDUC (2011)

Table I.
Number of higher
education institutions
(1990-2010)

above all by the decline of the technical training centers by 88 in the same period. This reduction is due in part to the closure of some institutions, either because they had few enrollments or did not comply with the minimum standards required by the accreditation agency. It is also explained by the fusion and purchase of some small institutions by educational holdings and economic groups.

Higher education has both expanded geographically and has diversified across the country, reaching regions which two decades ago did not offer professional careers. As a result today there is ample coverage of undergraduate careers and graduate programs in almost the whole country. As can be seen in Table II not all the branches – places where the higher education institutions have expanded their academic offer beyond their headquarters – have been declared by universities. This is consistent with the information supplied by the National Council of Education. This happens because not all branches exhibit the same levels of quality – many of them are located in small cities where there are not sufficient resources and/or the academic body is unconsolidated – which can severely affect the results of institutional and program accreditation.

As the National Accreditation Commission pointed out in its last public report:

The scale, nationwide, of youth studying in non-traditional undergraduate programs is something that is currently unknown, which accounts for the scant information available. To learn about the real characteristics of these branches and programs would appear to be a priority (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 40).

Certainly this situation constitutes one of the critical points of the present accreditation system in Chile.

2.3 The distribution of university programs

In 2008 there were about 3,400 university undergraduate programs, a figure very similar to that found in previous years. It is worth noting that, for the universities that make up the Council of Rectors, the total number of undergraduate programs tended to fall in the period 2005-2008. It is the new private universities that have maintained the number of programs on offer constant, practically duplicating the number of programs offered by the CRUCH universities (Table III). This reflects the continuous growth and positioning of these new private institutions within the context of the Chilean higher education system. At the same time, it reveals the need for an accreditation system that effectively ensures the quality of these recently created programs.

Year	Declared branches		Non declared branches		Total working branches	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
2002	386	73	146	27	532	100
2007	454	76	141	24	595	100

Table II.
Branches of higher
education institutions
(2002-2007)

Source: National Commission for Undergraduate Accreditation, *Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado, CNAP (2003)*; Rodríguez (2009)

There were 858 graduate programs available in 2008 of which 726 (85 percent) were at the master's level and 135 for doctorates (see Table IV). When examining the type of institution, the CRUCH universities provided 61 percent of the masters and 89 percent of doctoral programs (CNED, 2009). Thus, at the graduate level, there is a greater presence in the supply of programs from CRUCH universities when compared with the new private institutions. In general, graduate studies are not profitable for new private universities, therefore they are not offered by these institutions.

2.4 Undergraduate and graduate enrolment

Undergraduate enrolment is highly concentrated in universities and the share is approximately half in the CRUCH universities and half in the new private universities. An outstanding feature of the Chilean higher education system is that undergraduate enrolments have practically quintupled in the last 25 years, most notably in the case of new private universities which had a little less than 3,000 students at the beginning of the 1980s and now have an enrolment of more than 240,000 students (see Table V). As a result, new private universities have become relevant actors within the Chilean

Institutional category	2005	2006	2007	2008
State universities (CRUCH)	895	860	672	710
Private universities (CRUCH)	518	525	394	432
New private universities	2,239	2,233	2,090	2,279
Total	3,652	3,618	3,156	3,421

Source: *Índices*, CSE

Table III.
Number of
undergraduate programs
according to type of
institution (2005-2008)

University type	Programs		Total
	Master	Doctorate	
Council of rectors (CRUCH)	445	118	563
New private	281	14	295
Total	726	26	858

Source: CNED (2009)

Table IV.
Masters and doctorate
programs offered by type
of university (2008)

Institution	1983	1990	2000	2008
All universities	110,133	127,628	302,572	510,112
Universities of the council of rectors (state supported)	107,425	108,119	201,186	269,940
New private universities	2,708	19,509	101,386	240,172
All professional institutes	25,415	40,006	79,904	162,848
State supported professional institutes	17,891	6,472	0	0
Private professional institutes	7,524	33,534	79,431	162,848
Technical training centers (all private)	39,702	77,774	53,184	95,891
Total	175,250	245,408	435,660	768,851

Source: MINEDUC (2009)

Table V.
Undergraduate enrolment
in higher education
institutions (1983-2008)

system and will remain so, as long as they have the capacity to attract a large number of students. Given the market logic that prevails in these institutions, which may result in lowering of quality in order to be more competitive – i.e. low investment in infrastructure, low stability of the academic staff, etc. (Espinoza and González, 2011; González and Espinoza, 2011) –, accreditation becomes essential.

The enrolment in professional institutes has grown moderately in the last five years. Today it accounts for a fifth of all enrolments. Technical training center enrolments have oscillated in the last three decades with their lowest point at the beginning of this century but rebounding in the last few years. This is explained by the creation of the Millennium Scholarship Program (*Programa de Becas Milenio*) in 2001, which was targeted at young people with scarce resources (see Table V).

In addition, graduate enrolment has increased significantly in the last 25 years from a little less than 2,000 students to 25,000. Graduate enrolment is concentrated mainly in the universities that belong to the CRUCH (see Table VI). This is explained by the greater presence of these universities offering studies at this level, as well as by the prestige of their programs when compared to new private institutions. The provision of scholarships for graduate studies is conditional on the specific program being accredited.

3. Legal framework

In Chile, evaluation and accreditation began in December 1980 with the promulgation of the Law Decree (*Decreto Ley*) 3.541 which established, as mentioned, a diversification of the system, self-funding, the merger of the branches of State universities, the creation of regional institutions and the authorization for the creation of private higher education institutions. As a result of these changes, an authorization process was established which licensed the operations of the new private universities and granted them autonomy provided they satisfied various requirements. Quality control was mainly based on the examination of students by the traditional universities.

The promulgation of the Organic Constitutional Law on Education (*Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza, LOCE*) in 1990 created the Higher Education Council (*Consejo Superior de Educación, CSE*), an autonomous body with representation from various sectors of society responsible for ensuring the progress and quality of the system. The licensing process involved supervision by the CSE for a period not less than five years and not more than ten years until the institution reached full autonomy. Accreditation was not considered as a quality assurance procedure at that time.

A further stage occurred with the development of the Program to Improve the Quality and Equity of the Higher Education (*Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad y la Equidad de la Educación Superior, MECESUP*) in 1999, which established the

Institution	1983	1990	2000	2008
CRUCH universities	1,933	2,143	6,487	17,993
New private universities	0	0	1,218	7,355
Total	1,933	2,143	7,705	25,348

Table VI.
Graduate enrolment
(1983-2008)

Source: MINEDUC (2009)

National Commission for the Accreditation of Undergraduate Programs (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Programas de Pregrado, CNAP*) to formally implement a national accreditation system for institutions and programs. This new institution was given the task of designing and proposing a national system of quality assurance for all higher education. In 2002, the CNAP initiated a pilot project for institutional accreditation for autonomous universities across the country. Also in 1999, again as part of MECESUP, the National Commission for the Accreditation of Graduate Programs (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Programas de Postgrado, CONAP*) was established to propose the institutional basis, design and application of an accreditation system for graduate programs (master and doctorate) taught by autonomous universities.

The proposals developed by CNAP and CONAP derived in the Law for Quality Assurance or Law 20.129 at the end of 2006, which created the National System for Quality Control in Higher Education. Its core functions are to provide information about licenses and accreditation of institutions and programs. The new law created a Coordinating Committee, the National Accreditation Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, CNA*), which accredits institutions and licenses private agencies to undertake accreditation procedures, thus complementing its own work. By 2010 eight such agencies had been certified.

The new mix of public and private agencies constitutes a more open system for quality assessment for new academic actors, disciplines and professionals that participate in the management of the accreditation process and the development of new practices (Rodríguez, 2009).

The Chilean model of accreditation established by the Law 20.129 of 2006 is similar in approach to the US model. As in Chile today, the US models “do not have a central authority that exerts an exclusive national control over higher education institutions” (Zapata, 2007, p. 379).

Similar to Chile, in the US the accreditation function is carried out both by accreditation agencies whose recognition is in the charge of the federal government through the US Department of Education (USDE), and by a non-governmental organization named Council of Higher Education (CHEA). In order to be recognized by the USDE or CHEA, an accreditation agency must meet the requirements necessary to ensure that it is a reliable entity in educational quality matters. On the other hand, for the students of a program or institution to benefit from federal aid, the USDE requires, as a minimum, that accreditation agencies maintain criteria FOR program and institutional evaluation in certain areas (Korniejczuk, 2003).

In the US, accreditation of undergraduate programs is done through specialized and professional agencies, which is similar to what was established in Chile with the Law 20.129. In the US, accreditation can be defined as “a system of non-governmental scrutiny of academic programs and institutional effectiveness of colleges and universities. It is a voluntary arrangement in two respects: a university chooses whether or not to submit its programs to accreditation processes; and second, the accrediting agency’s policies are developed and revised by a voluntary process of consensus building among university officials and other professionals involved with higher education” (El-Khawas, 2008, p. 96). As in the Chilean case, in the US there are two forms of accreditation: of institutions themselves and of academic programs. So the Chilean model of accreditation is analogous to that of the US, although it must be

said that there are some differences between the two models. For example, in the US institutional accreditation is carried out by inter-university regional agencies, while in Chile this task is conducted completely by the CNA.

In synthesis, the main characteristics that distinguish quality assurance in Chile are: respect for institutional autonomy; the system's voluntary basis – with the exception of medical and teaching careers because these areas have been defined as priorities for the country's development by the Chilean government –; self-assessment and peer review as key features of assessment quality; the involvement of public and private agencies; the emphasis on self-regulation; and information access by users and institutions for decision-making.

Table VII synthesizes the principal characteristics of the process and the current methods for quality assurance in use today in Chile.

Different agencies provide information about the higher education system. Examples are the publication INDICES from the Higher Education Council, the web-based platform Future Employment (*Futuro Laboral*) and the Information System of Higher Education (SIES) of the Ministry of Education. The first delivers systematic background about enrolment, tuition fees, vacancies and entrance requirements. Future Employment provides information about the salary levels of graduates from distinct professional undergraduate programs for the second and fifth year after graduation. It also provides information about the “stock” of professionals available for employment. SIES furnishes information about a number of institutions, enrolment, graduates and scholarship programs for graduate studies. The three systems operate without any integration.

4. Accreditation results

4.1 Accredited higher education institutions

Institutional and program accreditation represents the seal of quality by a public entity and/or private institution, where in the latter case it has a long term vision which consists of a commitment to excellence and guarantees regarding key aspects such as the coherence of the curriculum, teacher quality and the trajectory of alumni. An accredited professional career is a clear public indicator that the undergraduate program represents a suitable choice of a career or program of study.

Table VIII describes changes in the regulatory system by type of higher education institution in the 2000-2011 period. Interestingly, along with a reduction in currently licensed institutions there is a significant increase in institutions that have full autonomy. This leads to the conclusion that the regulatory system has been strengthened over the years, principally explained by the consolidation of the university system at the expense of professional institutes and technical training centers.

The situation in which the institutions find themselves regarding accreditation is presented in Table IX. This Table shows, first, that during the last decade accreditation uptake has been a gradual process. While 77 percent of the private universities have been accredited, all CRUCH have been accredited by the CNA. On the other hand, the majority of the professional institutes and technical training centers have not requested institutional accreditation, which can be interpreted as a lack of interest or that they do not possess the mechanisms and instruments to ensure the quality of their teaching[3]. This fact can be explained by these institutions' own characteristics. Many, for example, are small entities that do not possess the human and intellectual resources necessary to carry out robust self-evaluation processes.

Processes/methods	Goals	Focus	Criteria	Results
Licensing (CSE)	Control and promotion of quality and auto regulation	Comprehensive considering both institutions and programs	Criteria associated with diverse areas (10-12), linked to development of institutional project	Approval of institutional project. Progress reports. Autonomy or closure
Institutional Accreditation (CNA)	Verification and promotion of quality at institutional level	Methods of quality control in areas of institutional management, undergraduate teaching and other elective areas	Institutional mission and goals, Design, implementation and policy adjustment. Methods of quality assurance	Self-evaluation and external evaluation reports. Public agreement to accreditation for a defined period of up to 7 years
Program accreditation (CNA and authorized agencies)	Verification and promotion of quality by programs (undergraduate, graduate, specialties in health)	Purpose and profile of graduate. Program quality, inputs, processes and results	The purposes and profile of programs. Defined criteria for academic/professional community	Self-evaluation and external evaluation reports. Accreditation agreement for 7 (undergraduate) or 10 years (graduate)
Information (MINEDUC)	Transparency and accountability	Information for system management and the public		National System for Information of Higher Education. System that provides information about the results of accreditation

Source: Adapted from Zapata and Tejada (2009)

Table X shows the proportion of enrolments in accredited institutions taking all eligible higher education institutions as base. These numbers show the importance that accreditation has assumed by people when choosing where to study. Institutions have become aware of the relevance of being accredited, since getting new students is dependent on this. Accreditation is particularly important for new private institutions, which, unlike traditional universities that have prestige gained during the last decades, need to differentiate themselves from the rest so as to attract more enrolments. Therefore, beyond the real motives that are behind the decision to engage in an accreditation process, the current Chilean accreditation model has contributed to the strengthening of the higher education system in the direction of better quality of

Table VIII.
Distribution of higher education institutions according to the different stages of the regulation system (2000-2011)

Situation	Universities ^a		Professional institutes		Technical training centers		Total	
	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011
Licensing	19	2	17	4	43	23	79	29
Under examination	7	0	32	8			39	8
Under supervision					67	17	67	17
Autonomous*	38	58	11	32	6	33	55	123
Total	64	60	60	44	116	73	240	177

Note: ^aIncludes 16 State universities and nine private or evolved from those existing in 1981 that were not incorporated to the examination or licensing process
Source: MINEDUC to December 2000 and MINEDUC (2011)

Table IX.
Number of Accredited institutions by December of each year (2004-2010)

Institution	2004	2007	2010
State universities (CRUCH)	5	15	16
Private universities (CRUCH)	4	9	9
New private universities	3	19	27
Professional institutes (all private)	2	12	15
Technical training centers (all private)	0	8	12
Armed forces and police	0	1	5
Total	14	64	84

Source: Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, CNA (2010)

Table X.
Proportion of student enrolment in accredited and in process of accreditation higher education institutions (2005)

Institutions	Enrolment		Number of institutions
	Number	%	
Accredited	379,854	68	44
In process	63,829	11	16
Not accredited	62,186	11	9
Outside system	57,680	10	23
Total system	563,549	100	92

Source: Adapted from González and Torre (2006)

institutions. This is due to the fact that institutions, universities in particular, have had to deploy specialized quality assurance units. As a consequence, processes and procedures associated with institutional management and undergraduate teaching have substantially improved.

The number of students enrolled in accredited institutions, or institutions in the process of accreditation, CRUCH and private universities amounted to 90 percent of total student enrolment in 2005. These proportions are approximately 72 percent for professional institutes and 88 percent for technical training centers.

4.2 Accreditation of undergraduate and graduate programs

There was sustained growth in the number of accredited undergraduate programs between 2001 and 2008. Of the total of undergraduate programs accredited in 2008, CRUCH universities taught approximately 90 percent versus 8 percent offered by new private universities (Table XI). Here a critical point of the Chilean quality assurance system is revealed, since new private universities are well behind CRUCH universities with respect to the accreditation of their undergraduate programs. The reason for this lies in the fact that, for new private universities, institutional accreditation has become more important than career accreditation because with the former they are able to ensure more enrolments. Regarding career accreditation, it can be said that these institutions have only been concerned about the accreditation of mandatory undergraduate programs (medicine and teaching careers).

In 2008, education related courses led the incorporation by discipline into the accreditation process (89 percent) when compared to other areas. This can be explained by the Law of Quality Assurance, which makes accreditation obligatory for education as it does for medical courses and programs (see Table XII).

There are currently 11,007 undergraduate programs offered in Chile. Of this total, one in four of each of the programs is in the process of closing as a result of oversupply and/or failing to meet the level of quality requirements essential for accreditation (see Table XIII). Data shows that the current Chilean accreditation system has had effective results in terms of the closure of undergraduate programs that do not possess minimum quality standards.

It is important to emphasize that to carry out graduate degree assessments, 15 permanent Area Committees were formed in 2008 to support the work of the CNA (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, 2008b*). The members of these committees are

Institution	2001	2005	2008
State universities (CRUCH)	3	79	155
Private universities (CRUCH)		126	177
New private universities		13	35
Professional institutes			5
Technical training centers			
Armed forces and police		1	2
Total	3	219	374

Table XI.
Accredited
undergraduate programs
by type of institution
(2001-2008)

Note: The numbers of programs refer to those with current accreditation (accumulated data) at December of each year

Source: Registry CNA-Chile.

QAE
21,1

32

Table XII.
Undergraduate programs
in the process of
accreditation by
disciplinary area (2008)

Area	Total programs	Programs within the process	
		<i>n</i>	%
Administration and commerce	488	35	7.2
Art and architecture	278	24	8.6
Natural science	121	25	20.7
Social science	241	45	18.7
Law	91	10	11
Education	467	416	89.1
Humanities	96	7	7.3
Natural resources	176	40	22.7
Health	261	73	28
Technology	668	115	16.7
Total	2,907	790	27.2

Source: Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, CNA (2008a)

Table XIII.
Undergraduate programs
in operation and in
closure process by
institution (2010)

Institution	Operating		Closing	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Universities	3,763		890	
Professional institutes	2,845		1,471	
Technical training centers	1,791		247	
Total	8,399	76	2,608	24

Source: MINEDUC (2011)

renowned scholars in their respective areas. This was done with the objective of strengthening graduate program evaluation by knowledge area through establishing clearer criteria for the development of self-evaluation processes and consequently to improve the quality of the programs.

According to the latest available data (see Table XIV), three out of four graduate programs were accredited by the CNA (80 percent of doctorates and 74 percent of masters). However, if the analysis is limited by type of institution, the CRUCH universities dominate with 84 percent of master courses and 87 percent of doctorates. In contrast, for the new private universities, only 59 percent of masters

Table XIV.
Offer of masters and
doctorates by institution
and accreditation regime
(2008)

University	Masters		Doctorate		Total	
	Programs (total)	Programs (accredited) (%)	Programs (total)	Programs (accredited) (%)	Programs	Programs (accredited) (%)
Council of rectors	445	84	118	87	563	85
New private	281	59	14	21	295	57
Total	726	74	26	80	858	75

Source: CNED (2009)

and 21 percent of doctorates (CNED, 2009) are accredited. This is another critical point of the Chilean quality assurance system.

An examination of the accreditation of graduate programs by disciplinary area shows that technology, law and agriculture dominate with more than 85 percent of the programs accredited. At the other extreme, in the area of education, only one in every two graduate programs has been accredited. At the master's level, there is a clear predominance in the areas of technology, agriculture, science and law, while at the doctorate level the areas of law, humanities and technology predominate with over 90 percent of the offering accredited (see Table XV).

5. Conclusions

The Chilean higher education system has experienced significant growth in recent decades, as shown by the geographical expansion of higher education institutions and the increase in the number of enrollments, especially in the private sector. In this framework, the system of quality assurance has had significant impact, ensuring orderly growth and providing better guarantees for users, as long as most higher education universities are accredited. It has also encouraged the development of the information available across the country about institutions and courses. Equally it has improved the conditions of access, admission and graduate employability, essential for the different participants in higher education to make informed choices. The *ÍNDICES* publication, the Information System of Higher Education (SIES), Future Employment (*Futuro Laboral*) and the CNA web page have all contributed to this.

For higher education institutions, the implementation of accreditation has led to the creation of offices for strategic planning, institutional analysis and assessment, normally with specialized units. This confirms the importance that accreditation has acquired in attracting more students, particularly in the case of new private institutions. Moreover, they are now using criteria and quality standards in many different processes. Higher education candidates have also begun to use these indicators to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions to which they apply. Similarly, higher education institutions are monitoring both learning outcomes of graduates and their impact in professional labor markets by following their employment path and seeking the opinions of employers (CINDA, 2007).

The process of quality assurance has established certain minimum standards of institutional performance, which has directly or indirectly resulted in the closure of institutions, either by choice or as a result of decisions by the relevant accreditation agencies. This is presented in Table XIII.

For State universities accreditation has raised awareness of the importance of greater efficiency in the use of public resources. For private universities there is an understanding that they must provide an adequate service to their students and so they need to reinvest more of their profits in educational programs. Moreover, for both kinds of institutions, accreditation is necessary to access competitive and student credit funds (Espinoza, 2010). Accreditation now has greater weight within higher education institutions and to meet this demand there has been the important addition of private agencies, which are certified by the CNA as part of the accreditation system. CNA's regulatory role is still incipient and there are difficulties still to be worked out. To date, no parameters have been established to determine the quality of services. Undoubtedly, the accreditation of undergraduate

Table XV.
Graduate programs
according to disciplinary
area, type and
accreditation regime
(2008)

Disciplinary area	Doctorate		Masters		Total	Accredited (%)	
	Accredited	Not accredited	Sub total	Accredited			Not accredited
Administration and commerce	2	1	3	106	27	133	79
Agriculture	10	2	12	36	6	42	85
Art and architecture	1	1	2	23	6	29	77
Natural sciences	34	8	42	58	10	68	84
Social sciences	9	3	12	85	31	116	73
Law	4	0	4	29	5	34	87
Education	2	5	7	59	59	118	49
Humanities	18	1	19	40	11	51	83
Health	6	3	9	47	24	71	66
Technology	20	2	22	56	8	64	88
Total	106	26	132	539	187	726	75

Source: CNED (2009)

and graduate programs provides more detailed information to users and helps to improve the efficiency of training and professional performance of graduates.

Increased program offers do not always bring proper standards, in either undergraduate or graduate programs. This situation can be explained, in part, by the increasing number of branches being opened and the growth of non-traditional programs and special modalities (distance education and part time courses). While some of these courses are serious offerings, there is the suspicion that a number have been created only to develop cash flow for the institutions. This partly explains the opening and closure of courses and programs.

In addition to the results observed, there are number of challenges that should be addressed in the short term. For the system as a whole, it is necessary to increase awareness that self-evaluation and accreditation are interventions with the long-term purpose of promoting continuous quality improvement at all levels. Thus, there should be a more fluid dialogue between the CNA and the private accreditation agencies so that criteria and procedures are similar, coherent and trustworthy for all. There should be clear criteria for the selection of evaluators to guarantee transparency and equity to institutions and programs that are being evaluated. In particular it is important to improve criteria and standards for the professional careers and to consider using the opinions of students, academics, employees and key informants. It is essential to develop a national and unified qualification framework in order to establish the necessary skill levels for professionals. This will facilitate job placement, as well as student mobility between institutions. There is also the need to strengthen the accreditation of institutions with international agencies which will facilitate the possibility of further studies in other countries. The simplification of validation and recognition processes for degrees from other countries will encourage greater professional exchanges and allow the possibility of work across national boundaries. Thus higher education quality assurance can contribute to the acceptance of internationally recognized standards. In this regard, a goal for higher education quality is to ensure that Chilean higher education and training is internationally recognized. Finally, the situation of a large number of technical training centers without accreditation must be addressed, not least because this type of institution cater for lower income groups for whom higher education is vital for social mobility.

It is important to develop and strengthen an institutional culture that practices continuous self-evaluation, with the implication that these practices must include all university functions. Thus, information systems must be improved, both by becoming more comprehensive and constructing indicators that, efficiently, represent the real situation and so allow participants to take timely decisions based on accurate, dependable information. Equally there should be improvements in the evaluation of academics' performance. Among all participants, there should be greater recognition of the value of teaching, together with improved student outcomes as a criterion for accreditation.

Notes

1. Chile's own internal accreditation process has been helped by the management of international networks such as RAUI, RIACES, INQUAAHE, from which it has learned about different experiences in distinct countries.

2. Universities in Chile provide both awards and titles which allow professional habilitation (exequatur).
3. The CNAP issued decisions regarding 65 institutions in 2005 made up of 44 universities (around two thirds of the currently existing universities), ten professional institutes and eight technical training centers. It should be noted that over the last decade 15 universities and professional institutes have been closed.

References

- Becker, W.E. and Round, D.K. (2009), “‘The’ market for higher education: does it really exist?”, IZA Discussion Paper No. 4092, Institute for the Study of Labor, Bonn, March.
- Brennan, J. and Shah, T. (2000), “Quality assessment and institutional change: Experiences from 14 countries”, *Higher Education*, No. 40, pp. 331-49.
- Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Andino (CINDA) (2007), *Acreditación y Dirección Estratégica para la Calidad en las Universidades*, CINDA, Santiago.
- Cifuentes, J. and Landoni, P. (Eds) (2011), *Direccionamiento estratégico universitario: Conceptos, experiencias y propuestas de la Red Telescopi*, Comunidad Económica Europea, Proyecto ALFA, Santiago.
- Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado (CNAP) (2003), “Estudio de sedes de instituciones de educación superior en Chile”, available at: www.cnap.cl/publicaciones (accessed 3 February 2011).
- Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA) (2008a), “Informe Resultados Acreditación 2008 CNA-CHILE”, available at: www.cnachile.cl/docs/inf-result-acredita-2008.pdf (accessed 5 February 2011).
- Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA) (2008b), “Informe de Actividades”, available at: www.cnachile.cl/docs/Fact_sheet.pdf (accessed 5 February 2011).
- Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA) (2010), “Resultados de acreditación”, available at: www.cnachile.cl/oirs/resultados-de-acreditacion/ (accessed 5 February 2011).
- Consejo Nacional de Educación (CNEC) (2009), “INDICES 2009”, available at: www.cned.cl (accessed 14 January 2011).
- El-Khawas, E. (2008), “Co-ordination, consistency and quality: evolving US practices in accreditation”, in Hernes, G. and Martin, M. (Eds), *Accreditation and the Global Higher Education Market*, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, pp. 92-111.
- El-Khawas, E., DePietro-Jurand, R. and Holm-Nielsen, L. (1998), “Quality assurance in higher education: recent progress; challenges ahead”, working paper, World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Espinoza, O. (2010), “Los Sistemas de Aseguramiento de la Calidad en América Latina”, *Akademeia*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 7-22.
- Espinoza, O. and González, L.E. (2011), “Impacto de la Acreditación en Instituciones y Actores: El Caso de Chile”, in Servetto, A. and Saur, D. (Eds), *Sentidos de la Universidad*, Ediciones Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Córdoba, pp. 63-96.
- Espinoza, O., González, L.E., Prieto, J.P., Fecci, E., Marianov, V., Mora, A., Ocaranza, O. and Rodríguez, E. (2006), *Informe sobre la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica. El Caso de Chile*, CINDA-Universia, Santiago.

-
- González, L.E. and Espinoza, O. (2011), "El Rol del Estado Frente a las Universidades Públicas y Privadas", in Brünner, J.J. and Peña, C. (Eds), *El Conflicto de las Universidades: Entre lo Público y lo Privado*, Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago, pp. 249-75.
- González, L.E. and Torre, D. (2006), "Acreditación y fomento de la calidad. La experiencia chilena de las últimas décadas", unpublished, Santiago.
- Gvaramadze, I. (2008), "From quality assurance to quality enhancement in the European higher education area", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 443-55.
- Harvey, L. (2002), "The end of quality?", *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 5-22.
- Korniejczuk, V. (2003), "La Acreditación de la Educación Superior presencial y a distancia en Estados Unidos y México", Universidad de Morelos, México, available at: www.um.es/ead/red/7/acredit.pdf (accessed 21 March 2011).
- Lemaitre, M.J. (2007), "Aseguramiento de la Calidad: Impacto y Proyecciones", paper presented at the Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación, San José, Costa Rica, 15 November.
- Middlehurst, R. and Woodhouse, D. (1995), "Coherent systems for external quality assurance", *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 257-68.
- Ministerio de Educación (MINEDUC) (2009), "Compendio Estadístico", available at: www.divesup.cl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92&Itemid=60 (accessed 15 February 2011).
- Ministerio de Educación (MINEDUC) (2011), "Listado de instituciones vigentes", available at: www.mineduc.cl/usuarios/sies/doc/201101031152140.instituciones_vigentes_enero_2011.xls (accessed 15 February 2011).
- Neu, D., Silva, L. and Ocampo, E. (2008), "Diffusing financial practices in Latin American Higher Education", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 49-77.
- Pires, S. and Lemaitre, M.J. (2008), "Higher education accreditation and assessment systems in Latin America and the Caribbean", *Trends in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, IESALC-UNESCO, Caracas, pp. 286-305.
- Rodríguez, E. (2009), *Rendición de Cuenta Pública de la Comisión Nacional de Acreditación*, Comisión Nacional de Acreditación, Santiago.
- Rodríguez, F. and Wilson, E.J. (2000), "Are poor countries losing the information revolution?", InfoDev working paper, World Bank, Washington, DC, available at: www.infodev.org/library/working.htm (accessed June 7 2012).
- Storen, L. and Aamodt, P. (2010), "The quality of higher education and the employability of Graduates", *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 297-313.
- Teixeira, P. (2006), "Markets in higher education: can we still learn from economics' founding fathers?", Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.4.06, Center for Studies in Higher Education, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.
- UNESCO (2009), *Conferencia Mundial sobre la Educación Superior: La nueva dinámica de la educación superior y la investigación para el cambio social y el desarrollo*, UNESCO, Paris.
- Woodhouse, D. (2006), "The quality of transnational education: a provider view", *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 277-81.
- Zapata, G. (2007), "Acreditación de la Educación Superior en Estados Unidos: el juicio de los tribunales", *Calidad de la Educación*, No. 26, pp. 377-407.

Zapata, G. and Tejada, I. (2009), *Informe Nacional Chile Educación Superior y Mecanismos de Aseguramiento de la Calidad*, Proyecto ALFA III Aseguramiento de la Calidad, Políticas Públicas y Gestión Universitaria, CINDA, Santiago.

Further reading

Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (CONICYT) (2006), "Formación de Recursos Humanos y Becas", available at: www.conicyt.cl (accessed 24 February 2011).

Consejo Superior de Educación (CSE) (2006), "Statistics", available at: www.cse.cl/Asp/Estadisticas2005/webcse_E_posgrado.xls (accessed 1 March 2011).

Stensaker, B. (2003), "Trance, transparency and transformation: the impact of external quality monitoring on higher education", *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 151-9.

UNESCO/OECD (2005), *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*, UNESCO, Paris.

Corresponding author

Oscar Espinoza can be contacted at: oespinoza@academia.cl