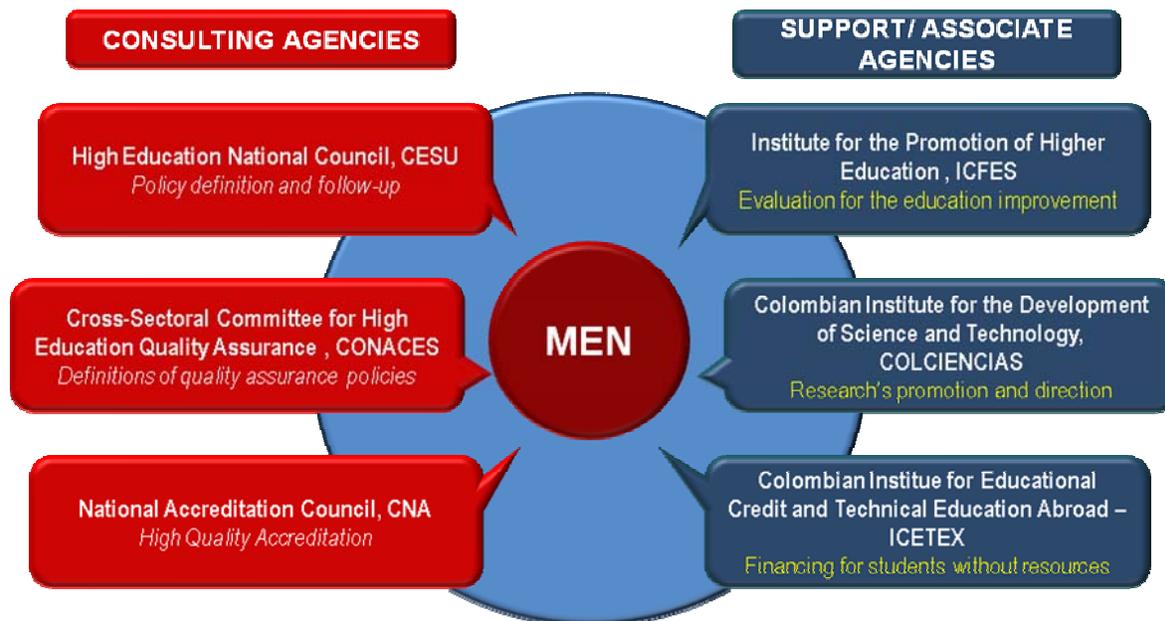


HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN COLOMBIA

As a result of the development of the 1991 Constitution, the Law of Higher Education - Law 30 of 1992 - is enacted and with it the formulation of constituent elements and organisms of the Colombian higher education system.

Law 30 of 1992 contains the fundamental regulations with which the Colombian State organizes the rendering of the service of higher education. Within this law aspects are developed, which from the same Political Constitution of 1991, become central elements of the regulation, including that related to university autonomy and democratic participation of the educational community in the government bodies and institutions management.



Levels and higher education institutions

Academic programs can derive into levels of undergraduate and postgraduate.

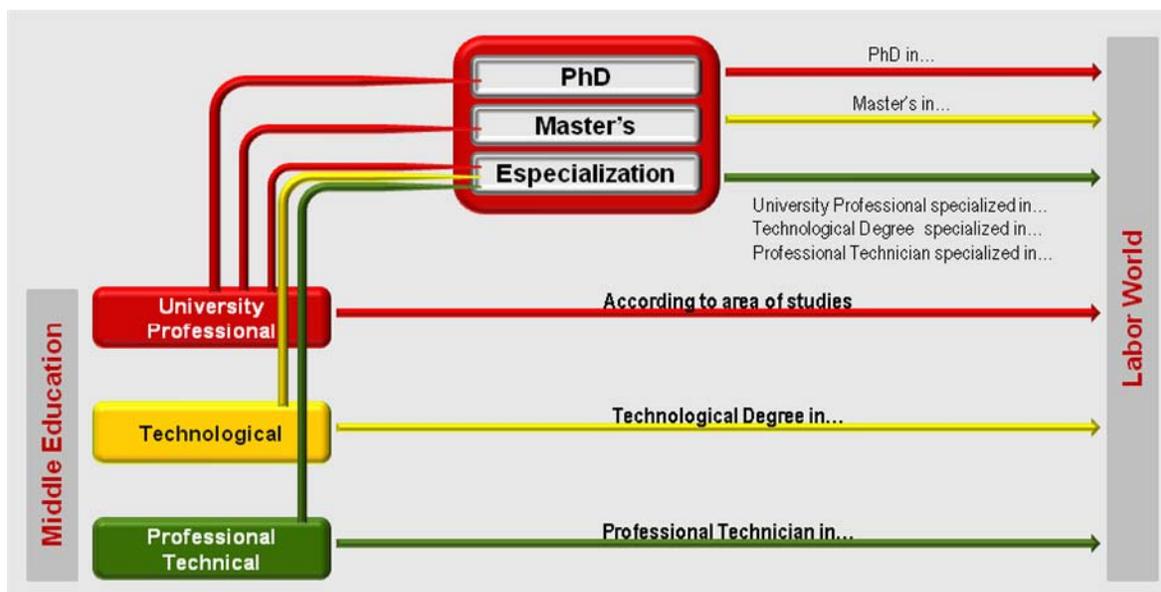
In order to enter into an undergraduate level a high school diploma which certifies having concluded high school (grades Tenth and Eleventh) is required. The State Exam conducted by the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education, ICFES, or its equivalent in other countries, is also required.

In Colombia undergraduate refers to three levels: Professional technician, Technological, and university professional. The system allows, as well, that those having culminated and passed Ninth grade enter the professional technical level.

Postgraduate programs are specializations, masters, doctorates, and post-doctorates.

Higher education in Colombia is offered by four types of institutions. Its nature is defined according to its field of action:

- **Professional Technical Institutions:** They offer education programs in occupations of operational and instrumental nature in a Professional Technical level and of specialization in technical fields.
- **Technological Institutions:** They offer undergraduate programs in Professional Technical and Technological and specializations in fields of technique and technology.
- **University Institutions or Technological Schools:** They offer undergraduate programs in all three levels, and in postgraduate, specializations and masters.
- **Universities:** They offer undergraduate programs in all three levels and all postgraduate modalities.



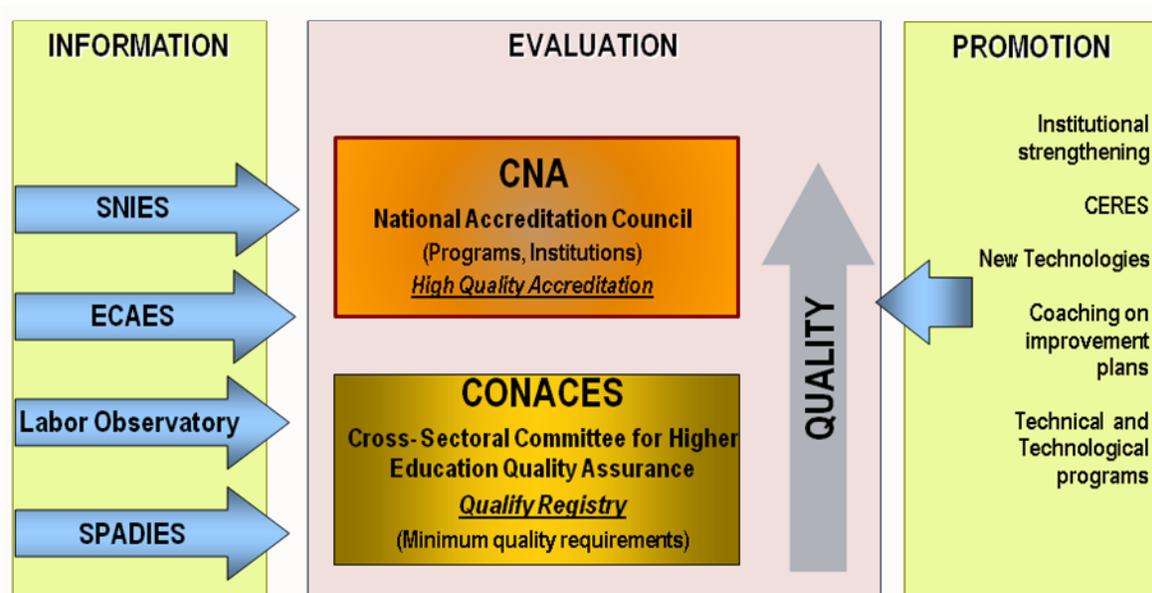
Quality Assurance

The policy designed to improve the quality of education aspires that all students, no matter their origin, social, economical and cultural situation, have the opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop the competences and values necessary to live, to coexist, to be productive, and to keep learning all through their lives. The development of this policy is based in the articulation of all education levels (initial, preschool, basic, high school, and higher education) around a common approach of basic, civic and work competitions, a challenge raised in the Ministerial Plan – Educational Revolution 2006-2010.

This policy revolves around four fundamental strategies: consolidation of the quality assurance system in all its levels, implementation of programs for promotion of competitions, professional development of teachers and directors, and investigation promotion. These strategies seek the strengthening of the education institutions, so they are places where everybody can learn, develop competitions and coexist peacefully.

As far as the consolidation strategy of the Quality Assurance System, we can say that its main objectives are oriented towards the institutions being accountable to the society and the State on the education service they render, that they provide trustworthy information to the users of the education service and that permanent self-examination of the institutions and academic programs is favored within an evaluation culture context.

The Quality Assurance System of Higher Education is comprised by three elements that are interrelated: information, evaluation and promotion.



Information

The information is supplied through four information systems which support formulation of the supply, evaluation processes, improvement plans, promotion programs and policy definition.

- **National System of Higher Education Information (SNIES):** It provides reliable data on Colombia's higher education institutions and the programs they offer, while facilitating the generation of consolidated statistical data and indicators. www.mineducacion.gov.co/snies.
- **Labor Observatory for Education:** This system offers an on-going follow-up on Colombia's higher education graduates. It brings together a variety of data to interpret the relationships between the higher education and the labor world. Its purpose is to provide the best possible guidance on education relevance and policies, program quality improvement and students' decision regarding their career choice. www.graduadoscolombian.edu.co
- **Higher Education Quality Assurance Information System (SACES):** it contains information on the Qualified Registry process of academic programs.



- **Higher Education Institutions Drop Out Analysis and Prevention System (SPADIES):** It's designed to track individual students in order to calculate drop out risk and prevent it. www.mineducacion.gov.co/spadies

Evaluation

The evaluation is carried out with the collaboration of academic pairs and consultant and support organisms, such as the National Intersectorial Committee for Quality Assurance – CONACES and its seven divisions organized by fields of knowledge, it is the organism in charge of studying compliance of the minimum quality conditions and of giving its concept before the Ministry of Education for the granting of the Qualified Registry of the programs, the National Board of Accreditation – CNA, which has the responsibility of publicly testify on the high quality levels of the higher education institutions and its academic programs, and the National Committee of Higher Education – CESU, and organization with functions of coordination, planning, recommendation and consultancy, integrated by representatives of all instances related to higher education.

The System evaluates institutions and programs at the moment of their creation, to obtain or update the Qualified Registry; periodically during its operation, and by request of the institutions when they seek for High Quality Accreditation, which has become a tool of self evaluation, self-regulation and continuous improvement of programs and institutions, as well as the starting point to consolidate university autonomy, it guarantees the society that the academic programs and the qualified institutions of higher education fulfill high quality requirements and carry out purposes and objectives which have declared of having and point at the acknowledgment of global excellence of the institution through the execution of great areas of institutional development.

During year 2009, 2.489 programs of higher education were evaluated, with that students, parents and society in general have a basic public quality guaranty of 99% of the supply of undergraduate programs and 98% of postgraduate programs. Likewise, 127 programs received in 2009 high quality accreditation on behalf of the National Board of Accreditation – CNA, and one (1) additional institution attained accreditation, thus reaching 17 institutions in total and, at the end of the four year period, the goal is to increase to 20 the number of institutions and that 440 additional programs have this recognition to their excellence, thus reaching 900 in total. To achieve this goal, and as fundamental base of all the Quality Assurance System, the minimum quality conditions were defined, and the elaboration of guidelines for the evaluation of all areas of knowledge and technical, technological, professional and virtual education will be continued with.

Students are evaluated prior to their entrance into higher education and their graduation from undergraduate studies, through an evaluation plan of accumulated competences. In the last semesters of undergraduate formation, students take the Higher Education Quality Tests. Through these tests, the National Ministry of Education seeks to prove the grade of development of the competences of the students that are in the last year of undergraduate academic programs of higher education institutions. Through the ECAES information on the current status of the formation in the different areas is obtained, which gives a global vision on the students, the programs and the institutions.



In higher education we have increased the number of evaluated graduates by the ECAES from 58.900, in 2002, to 97.118 in 2007 and 55 Basic Nucleus of Knowledge evaluated. Now the challenge is to adjust current tests to adequate them to the evaluation requirements of common competences for all professionals, as well as generic tests to the areas of knowledge. The first ones refer to basic competences similar to the ones evaluated in basic education and high school, of which development continues in higher education with higher levels of complexity. The second ones are those common to the areas of knowledge and generally they refer to competences which are required for work performance. Besides these two components, the ECAES will continue to evaluate specific competences of programs. The adjusted tests began being applied in 2009.

Promotion

Through the promotion, the Ministry offers technical assistance in evaluation processes; it accompanies improvement plans of institutions that have had problems obtaining the Qualified Registry; it develops projects focused in improving specific quality conditions, such as infrastructure, investigation, teacher's training; and it promotes pertinence in the supply of the different levels of formation or modalities.