ENQA REVIEW

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

2019

AVEPRO

Table of contents

Table of contents

1. Introduction

AVEPRO is an agency with unique features in relation to other Quality Assurance agencies in the world. Established in 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI, it has a universal vocation relating to numerous disciplinary fields in the domain of humanities, with a corresponding mission to evaluate Institutions of the Higher Education System of the Holy See throughout the five continents, in order to promote their academic institutional quality.

The Agency's main goals are, thus, the promotion and evaluation of quality. The resulting objective is not so much the accreditation of the Institutions, as rather constant support in the development of a culture of quality, responding to shared principles, processes and procedures.

In its global reach, AVEPRO operates in multiple national and regional contexts, addressing legal, linguistic, organisational and logistical complexities. In doing this, it is called to design and implement processes characterised by adaptation and flexibility, while maintaining its own identity as possibly best clearly defined and intelligible.

"Mission" becomes here the *key word*, which will hopefully emerge – with its vital importance – in the current evaluation process. The Agency's mission, which stems from the centuries-old *raison d'être* of the culture of faith-inspired Christian knowledge, enshrines also the added values of individual disciplines and their specific approaches to research, within the *common human good* that encompasses the planetary horizon.

In this context, our expectations are high. We desire indeed to ask of ENQA and of all the associated Agencies to help us in being creative in order to find innovative common solutions to critical problems of humankind today and to train leaders with the subject specific as well as the transversal competences required to develop just and sustainable societies.

With this developmental perspective ahead, we aim from our part at supporting a system based on trust and mutual interaction between Institutions, "holders" of the same interest. We are committed to spreading the spirit of Bologna and its values beyond Europe. We wish to strongly support the academic system of the Holy See, recently invited by Pope Francis to redesign itself according to the criteria introduced in the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* (2017). We are also willing to collaborate, within the scope of our competence, in solving the challenges presented in the epochal *Document on Human Fraternity*, recently signed in Abu Dhabi (2019).

Our identity, clearly focused on the promotion of the human family towards a global dialogue- and solidarity-based civilisation, considers quality in Higher Education in a particular connection with the challenges concerning the human person, the society, the environment and the common good. The quality understood in this way requires placing the students at the centre not only of the learning path but of an integral "formation project" that makes them indeed aware, responsible and proactive adults. Hence, our choice is to promote quality processes in support of the academic Institutions by putting ourselves at their service.

The Agency's ENQA *Full membership*, awarded in 2014, has shown that the particular characteristics of the academic system of the Holy See guarantee substantial compliance with the *European Standards and Guidelines* of the time and with their 2015 updated version. Our desire at this stage is to highlight not only the consolidation process carried out over the past five years, but also but also a creative development of the Agency in its task of being global, in a newly transdisciplinary and interconnected Catholic University realm. Aware of our weaknesses and limited resources, we have learned to value every experience and gain useful good practice. This is what we have tried to do during the current self-assessment process and what we hope will emerge at the end of the visit.

The evaluation report and the expected follow-up visit will also be helpful in defining our next strategic plan. Some challenges are already clear to us. As we must become progressively global, we intend to invest in relations with various stakeholders in the field of faith-based education projects, to strengthen ties with

national agencies in order to facilitate the work of academic Institutions as much as possible, to increase and optimize the training of experts, to monitor the adequacy of AVEPRO's QA operating model which combines evaluation with strategic planning. All this in a progressive policy of investing in the "promotion of quality", aimed at enhancing a permanent culture of quality, conscientiously assumed by the Institutions in their autonomous responsibility.

The Agency's particular identity, well remembered and creatively affirmed, implies our being aware that AVEPRO, Quality Assurance, the Bologna Process and the EHEA are only one aspect of our life and mission. We are only a part of a totality encompassing the whole world. In this respect we assume the words of Pope Francis as being particularly pertinent: "The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts…We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 235).

President of AVEPRO

2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

The development of the SAR broadens and complements the continuing monitoring and evaluation process that AVEPRO regularly carries out.

As stated in its Statute: "*The Agency prepares a self-evaluation report in compliance with the requirements established by the Registers and by the international associations it refers to*" (art. 12 § 3). Moreover, on a yearly basis AVEPRO assesses its past activities and achievements, and prepares a specific report. The yearly reports are presented to the Agency's Boards (Board of Directors and Scientific Council) and are also sent to the Secretariat of State[1] and to the Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE[2].

As stated in the SWOT Analysis (Opportunities), "*the ENQA review process has focussed on the improvements, developments and possible bottlenecks encountered since the first SAR and review process, which led to the Agency's full membership in ENQA*".

The site visit of the ENQA Panel in 2013 opened a process of reflection and redefinition of the strategies and objectives of AVEPRO. In particular, the Agency has been addressing the following issues:

- redefinition of AVEPRO's review methodology;
- improvement of the contacts with the students' association in the frame of the Holy See's academic system;
- delivery of a single standard report form and specific tools for drafting the SER (for the Institutions) and for analysing it (for the Commissions);
- reinforcement of the network of alliances with other actors involved in Quality Assurance processes so to organize periodic reviews for all HE Institutions that belong to the system of the Holy See and give the opportunity for a greater international visibility and active involvement in ENQA;
- increase of networking activities in order to integrate the available resources;
- redefinition of the roles of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council;
- definition of hypotheses aimed at implementing academic research within the QA framework of the Agency.

In this respect, the development of the SAR becomes one of AVEPRO's institutional activities which is in particular aimed at the consolidation of what has been achieved after the first ENQA coordinated review.

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[1] The Secretariat of State is a body (Dicastery) of the Roman *curia* and its origins go back to the fifteenth century. It can be seen as an equivalent to a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a Ministry for Internal Affairs combined together.
With the reform of the Roman *curia* disposed by the Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus* (John Paul II, 28 June 1988), the Secretariat of State takes the form of the curial organism which directly "assists the Supreme Pontiff more closely in the exercise of his supreme mission" (art.39). The Secretariat of State is composed by three sections: the Section for General Affairs and the Section for Relations with States (sections introduced by the *Pastor bonus*), and the Section for Diplomatic Staff of the Holy See (section introduced by the Communiqué of the Secretariat of State, 21 November 2017). The Secretariat of State is presided over by a Cardinal who assumes the title of Secretary of State. As the Pope's first collaborator in the governance of the universal Church, the Cardinal Secretary of State is the one primarily responsible for the diplomatic and political activity of the Holy See, in some circumstances representing the person of the Supreme Pontiff himself.

[2] The Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE is a body (Dicastery) of the Roman *curia*. From a general State perspective, the CCE can be seen as an equivalent to a Ministry of Education. As stated in the CCE website: "*The Congregation for Catholic Education gives practical expression to the concern of the Apostolic See for the promotion and organization of Catholic education (Apostolic constitution Pastor bonus, Art. 112). The Dicastery is responsible for: all Universities, Faculties, Institutes and Schools of ecclesiastical studies (which have a direct link with the Congregation and form the Holy See's Higher Education System) or civil (like Catholic Universities, colleges or Institutions and associations established for academic purposes) that depend on physical or moral ecclesiastical persons (Bishop, Religious communities); all schools and pre-university level educational Institutions of any kind (except those that depend on the Congregations for the Oriental Churches and for the Evangelization of Peoples) that depend on Ecclesiastical Authority, that from young people*".

The current development process has been influenced by two circumstances:

1. the reform of the Holy See's Higher Education system associated to the publication of the Apostolic constitution[3] *Veritatis gaudium* (December 8, 2017) and

2. the reorganisation of the Agency's governing bodies and the appointments of the Boards' members.

Concerning the first point, it is important to underline that, although in continuity with the past legislation (Apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana*[4], 1979), *Veritatis gaudium* introduces many important changes in the Holy See's Higher Education system that impact directly and indirectly on the Agency.

As stated in the Agency's guidelines (A)[5]:

"The document Veritatis gaudium should be considered as continuing along the lines drawn by the previous Apostolic Constitution regulating ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, Sapientia Christiana (1979). This connection between them is not abstract but effective, in that the text of the Foreword to the 1979 Constitution is included within Veritatis gaudium.
Veritatis gaudium should therefore be seen as a sort of evolution and continuation in relation to the previous normative framework. Certain changes are present and it can be argued that Veritatis gaudium is "a forward looking text": it suggests some directions for the Institutions to take, it leaves them the freedom (and the responsibility) to add the contents and methods necessary to achieve their objectives and implement the suggestions present in the text. In other words, what changes is not the subject of the academic activity ("what" needs to be done), but the "how" on the basis of the "why" it must be done."
"In this context the concept of "quality" takes on a new meaning, dimensions in which it is realized and criteria for its evaluation. In particular, the criteria for evaluation of the ecclesiastical Faculties can be found in the objectives contained in Veritatis gaudium (Art. 3), substantially reiterating those listed in Sapientia christiana."
"The Apostolic Constitution encourages reflection on the great changes of our era and motivates us to deal with the anthropological and environmental crisis that we are experiencing, with the hope of promoting a change in our developmental model: "the problem is that we still lack the culture necessary to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths. This vast and pressing task requires, on the cultural level of academic training and scientific study, a broad and generous effort at a radical paradigm shift, or rather – dare I say – at «a bold cultural revolution»" (Veritatis gaudium, Foreword 3)."
"Due to these principles the concept of quality must be assessed not only in relation to teaching but also to research, the third mission and all the academic Institutions' activities of management and governance."
"Lastly, this Apostolic Constitution mentions AVEPRO as the body to which responsibility is delegated for the evaluation of "Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, as well as the other Institutions of higher education" belonging to the Holy See's Higher Education System (Norms of Application, Part one, Section one, art. 1 §2)".[6]

The self-assessment process was launched in June 2018. It involved the Agency's entire staff, its Boards, and several stakeholders (comprising experts, representatives of students and ecclesiastical academic Institutions). In order to ensure an informed and participated perspective, also experts and advisors who have been regularly supporting the Agency for more than a decade, were engaged. Their role was mainly devoted to review the SAR versions, providing suggestions for improvement.
The SAR was drafted by the AVEPRO Director, with the support of the Agency's staff (both full-time employees and two part-time experts/advisors), under the supervision of the President. The final version of

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[3] Inside the Vatican legal system, apostolic constitutions are the most solemn form of legislation and are directly issued by His Holiness the Pope. Therefore, the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* constitutes the legal framework of the Agency. For more details about the Vatican legal system see Vincenzo Buonomo, "The Holy See in the contemporary international *relation. A juridical approach following the international law and praxis" in "CIVITAS ET IUSTITIA"* Review of the Faculty of Law of the Pontifical Lateran University, II (2004), pp. 7-40.

[4] Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana*, John Paul II, 15 April 1979.

[5] See §4.1.

[6] AVEPRO, Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A), § Introduction, 2019. More details about the AVEPRO guidelines can be found in the following § 4.1.

the SAR was edited by a professional graphic designer.

The figure below illustrates the map of subjects which were involved in the preparation of the SAR:
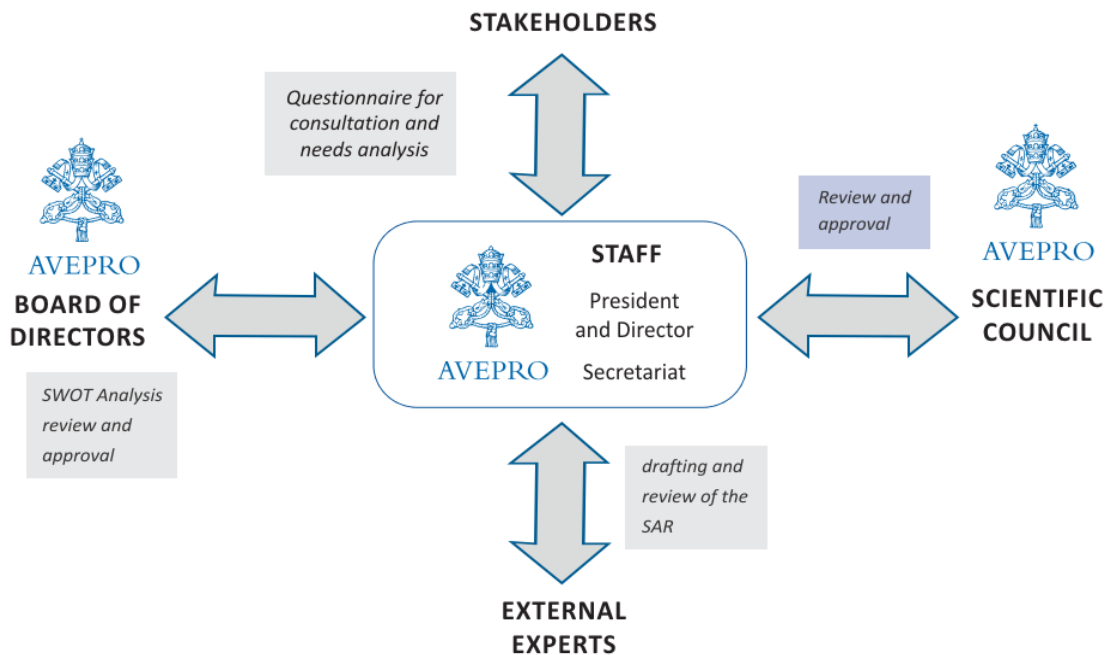
Two general criteria steered the self-assessment process:

 a. engagement and participation of relevant parties, including the Agency's staff and stakeholders,

 b. critical reflection, in a perspective of continuous improvement and enhancement.

Particular attention was paid to the points raised in the follow-up reports to the 2014 ENQA external review report. Furthermore, the involved parties acknowledged the magnitude and intensity of the challenges facing the Agency, in the renewed context defined by the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* and by its "Norms of application". As a matter of fact, the Agency's role will increasingly focus on the promotion of quality[7] across the Holy See's Higher Education system which is, by definition, global.

As regards the overall organisation of the review, the Agency took the following steps:
- weekly briefings involving the Agency's staff members. Approximately forty meetings were held during the process; attendees were updated and could express their viewpoints and proposals for the SAR. Information was shared and decisions were taken in a participated way;
- involvement of stakeholders in ecclesiastical academic Institutions to collect their points of view about QA processes and related needs;
- definition of the Terms of Reference (ToR) with ENQA;
- involvement of the Board of Directors in elaborating the SWOT Analysis;
- involvement of the Scientific Council for the SWOT Analysis and for the review of the SAR before its first release;
- release of the SAR first draft;
- involvement of an expert panel, composed of members of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council, to review the SAR first draft;
- release of the SAR final version;

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[7] For a more detailed presentation of the aspect of QA in the comparison between the *Veritatis gaudium* and the *Sapientia christiana* see Riccardo Cinquegrani "La qualità di fronte ad alcune sfide introdotte dalla *Veritatis gaudium* "/"Quality in the face of some challenges introduced by the *Veritatis gaudium"* in LAS, *Salesianum* 1/LXXXI/2019 (*ianuarius-martius*) *Veritatis gaudium*.

- approval of the SAR final version by the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council;
- submission of the SAR in the agreed form and by the deadline defined in the ToR.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus* (John Paul II, 28 June 1988)

→ Apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana* (John Paul II, 15 April 1979)

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

→ AVEPRO, Elements for a "Mid-term" Self-Assessment

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

3. Higher Education and QA of Higher Education in the context of the Agency

The Holy See's international status differs in nature from the personality of States and other non-States. In particular, current juridical doctrine assumes that the Holy See is a *sui generis person* and *non-territorial entity with legal personality* of international law, first in view of its "spiritual" functions, different from the "temporal" functions of States; secondly, because it differs from States with respect to such "factors" such as territory and population[8].

Also, it is worth mentioning that technically there are not any academic Institutions within the borders of the Vatican City State.

The centres for Higher Education of the Catholic Church are classified according to their *purpose* and the *content of their academic programme*s:

1. *Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions* (Universities and Faculties) and
2. *Catholic Universities and Faculties*.

Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions (Universities and Faculties) are governed by an academic legislation that is common throughout the world and it is based on the Code of Canon Law (CIC 815-821) and on the Apostolic

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[8] Cfr. Robert J. Araujo, *The International personality and sovereignty of the Holy See,* 50 Cath. University Law Rev. 291 (2001).

constitution *Veritatis gaudium* and its "Norms of application". They grant academic degrees under the authority of the Holy See.

Catholic Universities and Faculties are devoted, in the light of the Christian faith, to teaching and research in subjects that are commonly dealt by Universities. Such Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are regulated under different legal frameworks: the Code of Canon Law (CIC 807-814), the Apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae* (15 August 1990) and the national academic legislation and organisation of the countries where they are located. Catholic Universities and Faculties grant degrees in accordance with the civil authorities of the Countries in which they are established.

The distinction between the two "components" of the Holy See's HEIs implies that the CCE and AVEPRO bear different responsibilities and duties with respect to accreditation and QA. As a matter of fact, the CCE is responsible for the accreditation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions, whilst the Agency is by law and by Statute responsible for the Quality Assurance/QA of the ecclesiastical Faculties. Only under specific conditions (Article 4 of the Statute), the Agency can assume such responsibility also for other academic Institutions, such as Catholic Universities. It is important to underline the findings of the panels for QA in individual Institutions are taken into account by the CCE as an important element for the accreditation of these Institutions.

For more details about the "Legal basis for Quality Assurance" and the relationship between the CCE and AVEPRO please refer to the following chapter 3.3.1.

This foreword is key to fully understand the specificities of the Holy See's Higher Education System: with Higher Education Institutions in five continents, it is a "global player" (and this is intended as a point of Strength in the SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13 and Annex 4) with a specific need for a common QA approach which can keep the entire system as a connected and consistent whole.

3.1 The nature of Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions: basic definitions and distinctive features

According to the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* [9] the terms "ecclesiastical Universities" and "Faculties" refer to those Institutions of Higher Education which have been canonically erected or approved by the Apostolic See, which foster and teach sacred doctrine and the sciences connected therewith, and which have the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the Holy See [10].

The ecclesiastical Faculties are: the Faculties of Theology (*Veritatis gaudium*, Part 2 Special Norms Section I art. 69-76), the Faculties of Canon Law (Ib., Section II art. 77-80), the Faculties of Philosophy (Ib., Part 2 Special Norms Section III art. 81-84) and other Faculties (Ib., Part 2 Special Norms Section IV art. 85-87) which are listed in Art. 70 of the "Norms of application" of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*.

Accordingly, the Higher Education Institutions are classified as follows:

1. ecclesiastical University, Athenaeum, Faculty *sui iuris* (i.e. with independent legal personality), and "Connected" [11] Institutions,

2. ecclesiastical Faculty within a Catholic University, and ecclesiastical Faculty within some other kind of University.

Ecclesiastical Faculties can be part of either an Ecclesiastical University or a Catholic University; or a State or private University not belonging to the Catholic Church; or it can be an autonomous Institution.

Ecclesiastical Institutes can be either "affiliated" to a Faculty and award first-cycle degrees; or "aggregated" to a Faculty and award first- and second-cycle degrees; or they can be "incorporated" in a Faculty and award

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[9] *Veritatis gaudium*, Section I, "Nature and Purpose of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties".
[10] *Veritatis gaudium*, General Norms, Part I, art. 2 §2.
[11] *Veritatis gaudium*, Section X, art. 63-66.

second- and/or third-cycle degrees[12].

The Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences (HIRS) award first- and second-cycle degrees as associates of a Faculty of Theology, providing study programmes which better meet the needs of contemporary society (cf. CCE, Reform of the Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, art. 3)[13]. Faculty Centres are classified as Institutes "*ad instar facultatis*" and provide grants.

Interestingly, the different types of Institutions are defined on the basis of the organisational structure, the plan/programme of studies that is provided, and the related academic degrees that are awarded[14]:

Type of HEI	Requirements	Diplomas and degrees
UNIVERSITY	Four Ecclesiastical Faculties are needed to erect canonically an Ecclesiastical University	Three cycles: • Baccalaureate • Licentiate • Doctorate
ATHENAEUMS	Three Ecclesiastical Faculties are needed to erect canonically an Ecclesiastical Athenaeum	Three cycles: • Baccalaureate • Licentiate • Doctorate
SINGLE FACULTIES	Besides the Faculties of Theology, Canon Law, and Philosophy, other Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church and with a view to attaining certain goals. For instance: *Christian Archaeology; Bioethics; Social Communications; Law; Christian and Classical Letters; Liturgy; Missiology; Sacred Music; Ancient Near Eastern Studies; Psychology; Educational Sciences; Religious Sciences; Social Sciences; Spirituality; Church History; Arabic and Islamic Studies; Biblical Studies; Oriental Studies; Studies on Marriage and the Family*	Three cycles: • Baccalaureate • Licentiate • Doctorate
FACULTIES WITHIN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES or other STATE/PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES	Faculties erected or approved by the CCE which operate in the frame of a Catholic University or in another Institute of Higher Studies	Three cycles: • Baccalaureate • Licentiate • Doctorate
AFFILIATED	Only theological Faculties	First-cycle degrees
AGGREGATED	Only theological Faculties	First- and Second-cycle degrees
INCORPORATED	Only theological Faculties	Second- and Third-cycle degrees

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[12] For more details about ecclesiastical degrees and qualifications see the following cap. 3.3.2 "Degrees and other Qualifications in a QA perspective".

[13] CCE, Reform of the Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, 28 June 2008.

[14] *Veritatis gaudium*, Section X, Strategic Planning and Cooperation of Faculties, art. 62, § 2.

As highlighted in the "Requirements" column, Ecclesiastical Universities are required to have not less than four Faculties, while Ecclesiastical Athenaeums are required to have three Faculties (Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy are not compulsory). It is important to mention that the current *Veritatis gaudium* Constitution has brought about an important innovation as regards the revised plan of studies for Universities and Athenaeums. Whilst in the prescriptions of the previous "*Sapientia christiana*" Constitution (1979) it was stated that Faculties of Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law had to be in place for an Institute to be proclaimed "University", under the current reformed system (2018) the running of these Faculties is not required by rule any longer.

Type of HEI	Requirements	Diplomas and degrees
HIRS/ Higher Institutes of Religious Studies	HIRS are connected to a theological Faculty, which guarantees the quality of academic level and which confers the qualifications; the HIRS differs from the theological Faculty, because the study of religious sciences and the study of theology have different formative teachings and curricula.	First- and Second-cycle degrees

3.2 The network of Ecclesiastical HEIs as "global players"

Ecclesiastical HEIs are located in five continents. At the global scale, the CCE indicates the presence of 792 Institutions of Higher Education, comprising 289 ecclesiastical Faculties and 503 "academic entities" related to them (affiliated, aggregated, incorporated and HIRS[15]):

SINGLE FACULTIES INSIDE UNIVERSITIES or ATHENAEUMS

SINGLE FACULTIES (independent)

FACULTIES WITHIN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES or other STATE/PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Ecclesiastical FACULTIES in the world	289
EUROPE	207
AFRICA	15
ASIA	25
NORTH AMERICA	19
SOUTH AMERICA	22
OCEANIA	1

Faculties of	
THEOLOGY	160
PHILOSOPHY	49
CANON LAW	32
OTHER[16]	48
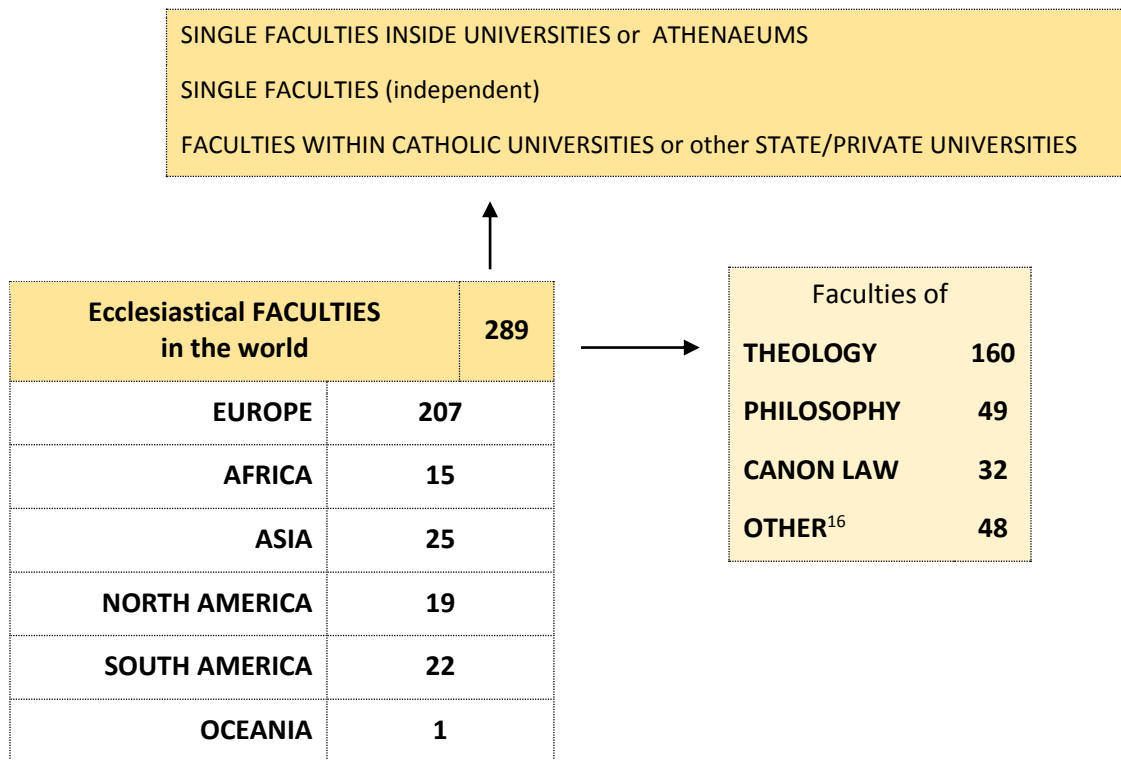
The 289 ecclesiastical Faculties are the main *users* and *beneficiaries* of the Agency's activities, with respect to quality evaluation and promotion. Therefore, in relation to the specific work of the Agency, from now on in this SAR the term "Institution" may be used to refer to ecclesiastical academic Institutions that are not affiliated, aggregated, incorporated and HIRS.

It has to be noted that the Agency's function is sometimes perceived as mere "control" rather than as quality promotion and enhancement. This is a point of weakness (see SWOT Analysis, Annex 4) and it represents a

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[15] Data for 2017.

[16] Listed in the Art. 70 of the "Norms of application" of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*: Christian archaeology, bioethics, social communications, law, christian and classical letters, liturgy, missiology, sacred music, ancient near eastern studies, psychology, educational sciences, religious sciences, social sciences, spirituality, church history, arabic and islamic studies, biblical studies, oriental studies and studies on marriage and the family.

challenge that the Agency will have to face in the near future. Each Faculty, by definition and by Statute, is responsible for the Institutions related to it (affiliated, aggregated, incorporated). Quality Assurance is no exception. Therefore, whilst the Faculty verifies the compliance of the quality policies implemented by the related Institutions, the Agency is responsible for supporting and verifying the process and the results through which the Faculty governs this area.

As of September 2019, AVEPRO has completed 128 evaluations in 9 different countries.

3.3 Quality Assurance principles and practices

The distinguishing characteristics of ecclesiastical HEIs are determined by their core Values and by the strategic objectives of their mission.
Granting adherence to the spirit and directives of the Holy See's *acquis*[17], the current reform process launched with the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* takes into account developments in the area of academic studies which occurred in these past decades. There has also been a need "*to acknowledge the changed social-cultural context worldwide and to implement initiatives on the international level to which the Holy See has adhered*".[18]

In this respect, a culture of *Quality Assurance* is currently embedded in ecclesiastical HEIs' plans of studies and operations. The principles of *accountability*, *enhancement* and *further development* of structures, processes and provisions are embedded in the activity plans of these Institutions. Self-evaluation and external evaluation help to improve teaching, learning, research, as well as all the necessary academic services. These also help to increase awareness about the fact that the academic community is working in an Institutional framework which provides a service to the Church.

The Holy See's adhesion to the Bologna Process[19] *was determined* and *is still inspired* by its desire to pursue and achieve certain reform objectives such as:

- respect for the specificity and diversity of the various university systems;
- creation of a common European Higher Education Area/EHEA to encourage the involvement of university Institutions in an international dimension;
- focus on quality as a value intrinsic to and necessary for research and innovation in universities.

The observations made by the 2014-2019 EU Commissioner Navracsics about the achievements and the future perspectives are acknowledged and represent a "fuel" for further development: "*We also face challenges in this changing environment: How do we recognise and reward good teaching as well as good research? How do we ensure that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can access and successfully complete higher education? How do we remove burdensome recognition procedures to ensure that students and graduates can be mobile? And how do we increase the relevance of Higher Education programmes for a labour market that is in a state of permanent transformation? The Bologna Process provides a space for countries to discuss these challenges, and this dialogue remains critical*".[20]

3.3.1 Legal basis of Quality Assurance

The Holy See's academic system adopts formal criteria and practices for *internal* as well as *external* Quality Assurance.

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[17] Vatican II and the previous Apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana* (1979), besides other regulatory documents. This aspect is considered as a point of Strength in the SWOT analysis (Chapter 13): "*AVEPRO is tasked with the implementation of quality culture in the ecclesiastical academic Institutions becoming part of the great work of reforming ecclesiastical studies initiated by the Second Vatican Council*".

[18] *Veritatis gaudium*, Foreword.

[19] Which took place on 19 September 2003, during the meeting of the EU Ministers of Education in Berlin.

[20] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pg. 3.

The advancement achieved by the Holy See since September 2003 is remarkable:

- on the one hand, ecclesiastical HEIs have generally adopted and are implementing the QA methodology, toolset and support services provided by AVEPRO;
- on the other hand, AVEPRO's mandate has been further reinforced in the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, strengthening its application throughout the Holy See's academic system.

Quoting from the *Veritatis gaudium*: "*Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, as well as the other Institutions of higher education, are normally subject to evaluation by the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO)*".[21]

As such, the AVEPRO's evaluation becomes mandatory for all ecclesiastical academic Institutions (since the "Norms of application" must be observed as stated in Art. 10 of the *Veritatis gaudium*). Nevertheless, since AVEPRO is not responsible for the accreditation of HEIs, there are not any direct consequences following the evaluation process. AVEPRO can focus its attention to optimise its mandate as a service and assistance for the ecclesiastical Universities, Faculties and other Institutions of higher education to develop and design their Quality Assurance and management systems. The report of evaluation is published on the Agency's website and sent to the CCE, which is the authority that can proceed with formal decision according to the evaluation results.

Following the promulgation of the *Veritatis gaudium*, other legal acts (primarily the CCE's Circular Letter nr. 1/2018) have been published, adding specific indications for the appropriate and punctual implementation of the law. In this respect, the Circular Letter stressed that "*all ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties throughout the world*" are expected to implement AVEPRO's processes and procedures related to QA.

This aspect implies an impact of the ESG outside the EHEA. Therefore, AVEPRO has to manage the tension resulting from the need to comply with the European norms, while assuring the flexibility required by its worldwide competence.

One possible way to manage these tensions is to avoid a sort of European-centric approach (a potential Threat, as stated in the SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13) and to value the ESG as being the common foundations upon which regional QA systems may be built, as it is also suggested by position papers published by international key stakeholders[22].

3.3.2 Degrees and other Qualifications in a QA perspective

The Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area/QF-EHEA (revised 2018) has been taken as the binding model, valuing its solidity and considering its widespread adoption by the EU-28 as well as by neighbouring countries. The Holy See's central government (above all the CCE) and the ecclesiastical HEIs made an extraordinary effort to comply with the Bologna requirements.

The Holy See's degrees and other qualifications are issued exclusively by ecclesiastical Institutions: *"Only Universities and Faculties canonically erected or approved by the Holy See and ordered according to the norms of this present Constitution have the right to confer academic degrees which have canonical value".*[23]

To guarantee the homogeneity of the Higher Education system, the degrees and qualifications are the same the world over: even if issued by Institutions situated in different countries and continents, *"The academic degrees conferred by an ecclesiastical Faculty are: Baccalaureate, Licentiate, and Doctorate".*[24]

The three degrees correspond to the I, II and III cycle defined within the Bologna Process:

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[21] *Veritatis gaudium*, "Norms of application", Part I, Section I, art. 1, §2.
[22] EUA, 2019: Quality Assurance in Africa, Asia and Europe: differences and similarities, by T. Loukkola.
[23] *Veritatis gaudium*, Part 1, Sec. I, art. 6.
[24] Ibid., Part 1, Sec. VII, art. 46.

CYCLE	CHARACTERISTICS
I CYCLE	It usually requires a minimum of 3 years. For the Faculty of Theology, due to the inherent connection between philosophy and theology, the I academic Cycle takes at least 5 years, focussing on philosophical-theological studies. This cycle provides a basic introduction to the subject and its scientific methodology. If completed successfully, the I Cycle ends with a baccalaureate degree (*baccalaureatus*) or other equivalent degree, as established by the Faculty's Statute. Usually, the I Cycle provides for 180 ECTS.
II CYCLE	It requires a minimum of 2 years. It consists in the beginning of a specialised field of study. If completed successfully, this Cycle ends with a licentiate (*licentia*). A licentiate is required in order to teach in Major Seminaries or equivalent Institutions for the formation of priests (see *Veritatis gaudium*, Sect. VII, art. 50). Usually, the II Cycle provides for 120 ECTS.
III CYCLE	It normally lasts 3 years. It implies the completion of scientific education and ends with the award of a doctorate (*doctoratus*). A key requisite for obtaining a Doctorate is a doctoral dissertation that makes a real contribution to the progress of science, written under the direction of a professor, publicly defended and collegially approved; the principal part, at least, must be published. The Doctorate is necessary to teach in an ecclesiastical Faculty.

Accounting of the diversity on a global scale, the Apostolic constitution permits the use of other expressions to indicate the academic degrees and states that:

"Academic degrees can be given different names in the Statutes of the individual Faculties, taking account of the university practice in the local area, indicating, however, with clarity the equivalence these have with the names of the academic degrees above and maintaining uniformity among the ecclesiastical Faculties of the same area".[25]

The following chart provides an overview of the Qualifications Framework adopted by the Holy See[26]:

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a[25] *Veritatis gaudium*, Part 1, Sec. VII, art. 47.
[26] Qualifications Framework, available on the CCE's website.

YEARS OF STUDY	CYCLE/ DEGREE	PHILOSOPHY	THEOLOGY	CANON LAW	SPECIALIZED STUDIES
	Post Doc	Post Doc	Post Doc	Post Doc	Post Doc
8 7 6	**Doctoratus** Doctorate	**Doctoratus in Philosophia** Doctorate in Philosophy	**Doctoratus in Theologia** Doctorate in Theology / **Licentia in Theologia** Licentiate in Theology, with specialization	**Doctoratus in Theologia** Doctorate in Theology	**Doctoratus in Iure Canonico** Doctorate in Canon Law	**Doctoratus** Doctorate
5 4	**Licentia** Licentiate	**Licentia in Philosophia** Licentiate in Philosophy	**Baccalaureatus in Theologia** Bachelors in Theology	**Baccalaureatus in Theologia** Bachelors in Theology	**Licentia in Iure Canonico** Licentiate in Canon Law	**Licentia** Licentiate
3 2 1	**Baccalaureatus** Bachelors	Short cycle (Without academic degree)	**Baccalaureatus in Philosophia** Bachelors in Philosophy	Two-year cycle in Philosophy (Without academic degree)	Three-year cycle in Theology	Introductory two-year cycle (in Philosophy)	Five – year cycle in Philosophy and Theology	PROPEDEUTIC PHASE	Introductory two years	**Baccalaureatus** Studium generale Other ecclesiastical or non ecclesiastical studies	**Bacca - laureatus** Appropriate Bachelors

	Other Higher Education Studies
Higher Education	Other requiraments
Secondary Education	Qualification required for admission to the civil university of one's own country; Secondary school, minor seminary.

Concerning the Holy See's "general Higher Education policy", apart from the minimum requirements established by the Canon Law in force, the competent ecclesiastical authorities also carefully consider the specific requirements of the country where an Institution operates.

Even in those cases where there are not any formal/legal obligations, the Holy See seeks to ensure at least the same standards as the educational system of the country in question.

The Apostolic constitution also accounts for recognition problems resulting from the contemporary and pressing phenomenon of migrations and the inability to provide formal documents stating one person's educational attainment and degrees:

"The Faculty should also determine in its Statutes procedures for evaluating the ways to treat the cases of

refugees, exiles and persons in similar situations who lack the normal documentation required".[27]

This is indeed a remarkable challenge implying a model and policies that put students at the centre of the HE System.
The CCE, following the revised model for the Diploma Supplement adopted by the Paris Summit (24-25 May 2018), will establish guidelines for the correct use of the Diploma supplement[28] in countries where the international conventions stipulated by the Holy See require it.

3.3.3 Ecclesiastical HEIs' governance in a QA perspective

The QA perspective informs and determines the way ecclesiastical HEIs shape their governance structures and processes, as defined in their Statutes. In this respect, ecclesiastical HEIs include QA principles in their organisational solutions and practices, e.g. set-up of quality offices, implementation of participatory events involving internal stakeholders, development of participated self-evaluation and strategic planning. Consistently with the communiqués of the 2018 EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris and the 2015 EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan, the Holy See's academic system is committed to "*Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in Higher Education governance, and public responsibility for and of Higher Education*".[29]

Also, the Holy See is committed to take the implementation of the ESG forward, removing the remaining obstacles in national legislation and regulations: "*Quality Assurance is key in developing mutual trust as well as increasing mobility and fair recognition of qualifications and study periods throughout the EHEA*".[30]

It is a priority to define and assign clear responsibilities to the governing bodies in order to ensure the constant enhancement of processes, procedures and provisions. This also entails the engagement of different academic components (e.g. students, professors, support staff) as well as of other stakeholders. The quality of governance depends on its capacity to give voice to these groups and involve them in determining the way the Institution should proceed.

The Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, in its articles 11-19, determines the principles and the features of the academic community and its governance. The underlying principles[31] refer to the fact that the University or Faculty is a "*community of study, research and formation, which operates, on an official level, in pursuit of its primary aims, […] in conformity with the principles of the evangelizing mission of the Church*". Furthermore, "*within the academic community, all the people, either as individuals or as members of councils, are, each according to his or her own status, co-responsible for the common good and must strive to work for the same community's goals*".

It is worth recalling that students represent a core component within the academic community, both as individuals and as associations. They make their voices heard in the Institution's governance through freely elected representatives and are at the centre of the learning process. Their requests and their evaluations should produce deep impact on HEIs.
Nevertheless, the communication about the Agency and its services does not always reach the students (point of Weakness, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13 and Annex 4)

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae* (John Paul II 15 August 1990)
→ Apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana* (John Paul II, 15 April 1979)

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[27] *Veritatis gaudium,* Part 1, Sec. IV, art. 32, § 3.
[28] CCE's Circular Letter nr. 1/2018.
[29] Paris Communiqué, adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris, 25th May 2018, p. 1.
[30] Ibid., p. 2.
[31] *Veritatis gaudium,* Section II, art. 11.

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)
→ CCE/Circular Letter n° 1/2018
→ CCE, Qualifications framework
→ AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

4. History, profile and activities of the Agency

The creation of the Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), established by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI on 19 September 2007, strengthened and pinned down the Holy See's adhesion to the Bologna Process.[32]

The organisation and mandate of AVEPRO are described in a few key documents:

→ the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* in its "Norms of application", Part I, General Norms, Section I: Nature and Purpose of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Apostolic Constitution, articles 1-10), it is stated the nature and role of the Agency;

→ the Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus*, published in 1988 – in its arts. 186 and 190-191 it is stated that it is an Institution connected to the Holy See;

→ the AVEPRO's *Statute*, revised in 2015 and in force for five years, defining the main features, scope and organs necessary for the Agency's operations.

4.1 The Agency's scope and mandate

AVEPRO *promotes* the quality of ecclesiastical academic Institutions to fulfil their proper mission and *evaluates* the attainment of appropriate international standards. The Agency's mandate to *evaluate* is stated in Art. 1, § 2 of the "Norms of application" of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium.*

Such legal recognition puts AVEPRO and its operations in a renewed formal framework which testimonies of the profound consideration of Quality Assurance within the ecclesiastical academic system. The *Agency's remit* relating to Quality Assurance procedures extends *worldwide*.
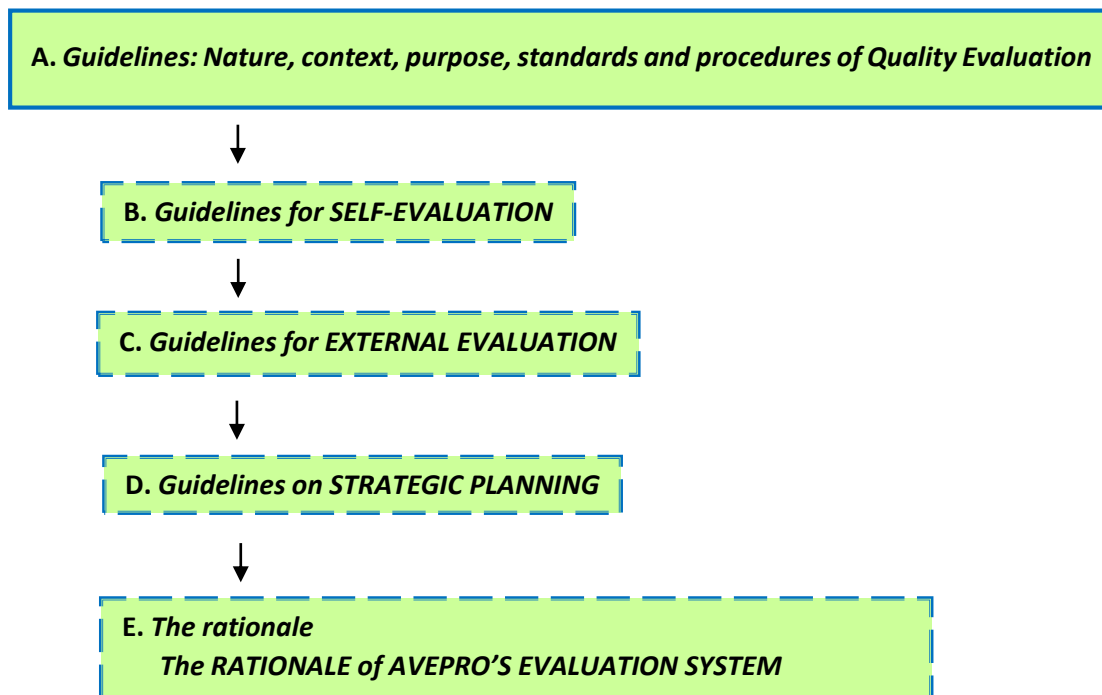
PROMOTION and DEVELOPMENT of QUALITY for ecclesiastical academic Institutions
1. GUIDANCE AVEPRO provides guidelines and tools to carry out internal QA and for the promotion of quality; the Agency supports ecclesiastical academic Institutions in developing their own internal quality framework
2. EXPERT ADVICE AND EMPOWERMENT AVEPRO supports ecclesiastical academic Institutions in improving the quality of their activities, processes and procedures through external evaluations
3. INFORMATION AND BRIEFINGS AVEPRO provides ecclesiastical academic Institutions with up-to-date information and briefings about QA at European and worldwide level. AVEPRO also favours dissemination in academic fields
4. SELECTION AND TRAINING OF EXPERTS AVEPRO selects and offers a training path for experts involved in external evaluation visits

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[32] It occurred on 19 September 2003 in Berlin during the EHEA meeting with the Ministers responsible for higher education from 33 European countries.

In accordance with the norms of the Holy See on Higher Education and this vision, the Agency operates within a spirit of *leadership* and *independence*, *transparency* and *accountability*, *respect for the traditions* and *ethos of individual Institutions*, *adaptability* to change and *evidence-based decision making*.

In keeping with the overall purpose of the Bologna Process, AVEPRO supports ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities in developing internal Quality Assurance processes, providing them the guidelines[33], toolset and guidance needed to comply with international quality standards in teaching, learning, research and services. This is a task that requires close collaboration between the Agency and the Faculties scattered all around the world, establishing relationships among peers (being a point of Strength, see SWOT Analysis, Chapter 13).

The AVEPRO guidelines constitute a set of five documents composed by an initial general document (A) which contextualizes the whole quality evaluation process and four other documents (B, C, D and E) that deal more in-depth with the topics introduced in the document A):

A. *Guidelines: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality Evaluation*

↓

B. *Guidelines for SELF-EVALUATION*

↓

C. *Guidelines for EXTERNAL EVALUATION*

↓

D. *Guidelines on STRATEGIC PLANNING*

↓

E. *The rationale*
        The RATIONALE of AVEPRO'S EVALUATION SYSTEM

In this SAR, when referring to the Agency's "guidelines" it is meant the full set of five documents. Otherwise direct reference to the specific documents is provided.

The toolset is made of different tools that are updated regularly with the support of key stakeholders (internal, e.g. Faculties, students; external, e.g. the CCE, the Episcopal Conferences) and are likely to grow in number accordingly to the specific needs and requests that will come from ecclesiastical academic Institutions (see also §10.2). At the moment the toolset is made of:

→ AVEPRO guidelines (documents A, B, C, D and E)
→ Templates (e.g. SER Form)
→ E-learning modules

The tools are available to all interested parties. It is worth pointing out that in this SAR, the term "tools" is a general term that can refer to one of the above or to a combination of all of them, depending on the context. Moreover, the Agency produced some practical tools for experts (e.g. presentations for ad hoc seminars,

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[33] More details about the AVEPRO guidelines can be found in the following § 4.6.

papers on specific issues) and Evaluation Commissions (e.g. SER analysis form, evaluation report template). A complete overview of the available "tools" can be found in the following §6.2 table.

## 4.2 AVEPRO's internal organisation: structure and operations

In accordance with the norms of current Canon law and of the international agreements in the area of Higher Education of which the Holy See is a signatory party, AVEPRO enjoys total independence in carrying out its activities.

The Agency's bodies comprise:

➡ the President
➡ the Board of Directors
➡ the Scientific Council.

The Agency's structure also comprises the Director and other staff members. Moreover, the Agency uses the services of advisors and external experts.

The following chart describes the internal organisation:
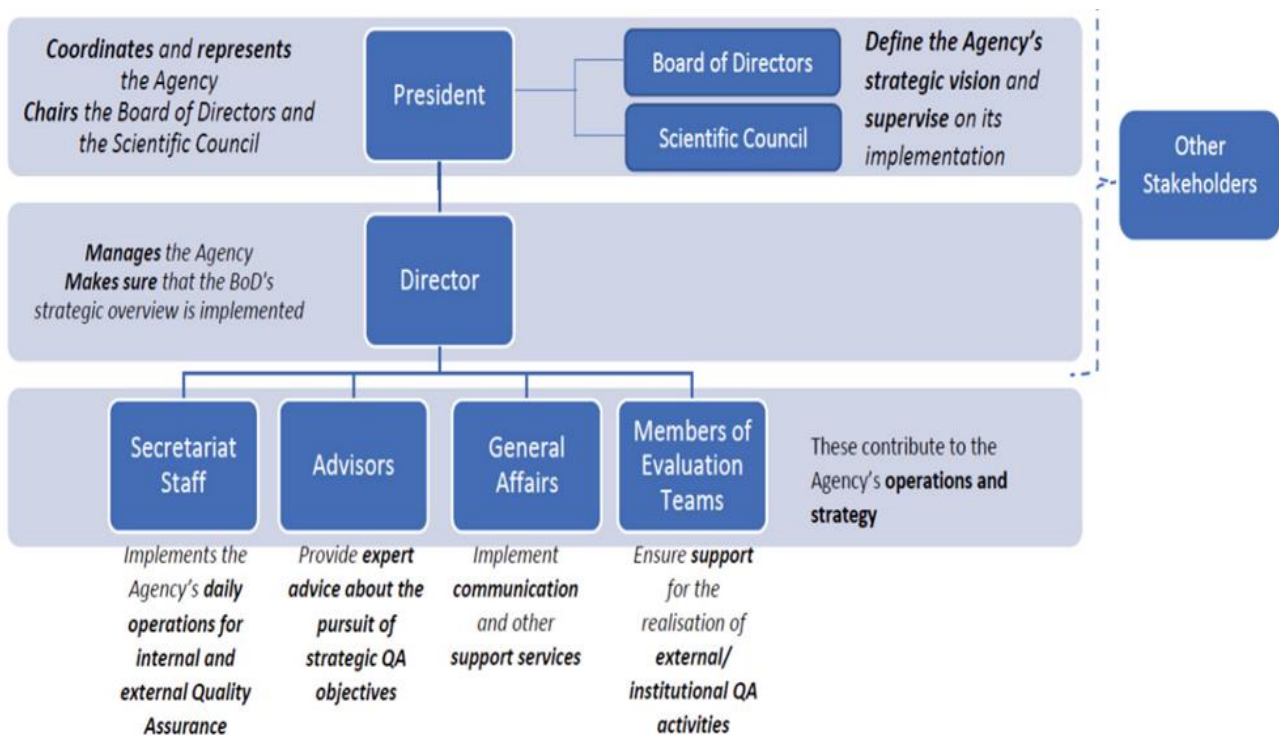
The Agency's Statute, from article 6 to 11, sets out the roles and responsibilities of AVEPRO's organs and staff.

The President is appointed by the Pope for a five-year term. The appointment is renewable only once. The President runs and represents the Agency.

The Board of Directors, chaired by the President of the Agency, approves the main orientations and supervises the activities of the Agency, as well as monitoring its results.

The Board members are appointed for a five-year term, renewable only once, by the Pope, to whom they are proposed by the President of the Agency. They have qualifications and experience both in academic areas and in the specific field of quality promotion. They should also reflect, as far as possible, the various

competences as well as the diversity and geographical extension of the Church. The Board of Directors is composed of a minimum of five and a maximum of ten members.

The Scientific Council, chaired by the President of the Agency, helps him in the fulfilment of the Agency's activities. The Scientific Council meets at least once every two years, when convened by the President. The President can also summon single members of the Scientific Council whenever needed or deemed convenient. The Scientific Council provides reasoned advice on the modalities used for quality evaluation, as well as on the choice and preparation of the experts in charge of evaluations.

The members of the two boards are selected on the basis of their competence and international accountability. Usually they are well-known experts in HE aspects (e.g. Rectors, officers of international organization active in the field of education, leaders of QA Agencies, Presidents of universities, President or General Secretary of universities networks) or scholars active in research fields that are relevant to the Holy See Higher Education system (such as Theology or Philosophy). Both boards can rely on students' voice. The statute of the Agency foresees that in the Board of Directors and in the Scientific Council a students' representative is appointed. In both cases they are full members and have the same rights and duties of the other members. Students' representatives are appointed by the President in accordance with the proposal of the (up to now unique) students' association of ecclesiastical Faculties.

Both Boards concretely support the daily work of the Agency. Moreover, the involvement of advisors and international external experts contributes to the Agency's effectiveness (point of Strength, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13 and Annex 4).

The Director, is appointed "*by the President of the Agency with the authorization of the Secretariat of State, which consults the Secretariat for the Economy*" (art. 10 of the Statute). He or she is selected accordingly with the "Regulation of the independent Evaluation Commission for the recruitment of lay personnel to the Apostolic See"[34]. Moreover, the candidate should have a degree, experience and a professional profile coherent with the organisation chart of the Agency. The Director, in accordance with the indications and instructions of the President coordinates the activities of the office and staff for the fulfilment of the programmes and tasks of the Agency, and takes care of the administration of the Agency.

The staff of the Agency supports the Director and the President in implementing the Agency's strategy and day-by-day operations. The staff of the Agency is recruited by the President of the Agency from clerics, religious or lay candidates distinguished by virtue, circumspection and appropriate experience, as well as by their knowledge, the latter confirmed by the possession of qualifications specified by the Mansionario Generale of the Roman Curia[35]. The authorization of the Secretariat of State, which consults the Secretariat for the Economy, is necessary for the purpose of such appointments (art. 10 of the Statute).

The advisors are appointed by the President of the Agency, to carry out specific tasks and services related to internal Quality Assurance and to the enhancement of the Agency's operations.

The experts for the external evaluation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions are appointed for a five-year term by the President of the Agency, after consultation with the CCE, on the strength of their scientific competence as well as academic experience. The names of Experts are added to a list from which they are selected for individual evaluations. This list must be composed of a number of persons sufficient to carry out all the planned evaluations in a reasonable period of time and in the main languages.

Considering the challenges ahead (as discussed in Chapter 14), the Agency is aware of the necessity to

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[34] This Regulation of the independent Evaluation Commission for the recruitment of lay personnel to the Apostolic See is available only in Italian on the ULSA/Ufficio del Lavoro della Sede Apostolica/Labor office of the Apostolic See website.
[35] The Mansionario Generale of the Roman Curia is a part of the General Rules of the Roman Curia/Regolamento generale della Curia Romana (30 April 1999).

increase its resources, comprising its staff, as analysed in Standard 3.5.

4.3 AVEPRO's international position

As already stated, AVEPRO's geographical coverage is global. In other words, the "national" dimension of the Agency should be considered a "universal" dimension. We are aware that this makes the Agency's mission, scope and geographical coverage unique in the field of Quality Assurance agencies.

The Agency works to evaluate quality principles and processes. Following *Veritatis gaudium*, the contextual reality of the assessed Institutions, their social and cultural environments must be an element taken into account by the Evaluation Commissions in their recommendations to the HEI. This "glocal" approach is to be enhanced. As stated in its Statute: "*The Agency operates in an international dimension and is structured taking this into account, in accordance with the universal vocation of the Church*" (Article 4 "Scope of the Agency's work", § 1).

For ENQA purposes, despite its global reach and the need to comply with a broad range of national regulatory frameworks for Higher Education, AVEPRO adapts its methodological frameworks to the main findings of a few international projects, in order to keep its QA processes in line with the best practices in Europe, with the intention of contributing to the development of new frameworks for the EHEA[36].

As further explained in Chapter 8, AVEPRO has been liaising and collaborating with other Agencies which are members of the ENQA network, as part of its activities.[37] For example, it has carried out joint evaluations with AQ in Austria and SKVC in Lithuania, exchanged information and policy-oriented initiatives on the issues related to Quality Assurance with NOKUT (Norway) and UKÄ (Sweden), and signed a memorandum of understanding with NAKVIS (Slovenia).
These collaborations show that AVEPRO is an international credible actor (point of Strength, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

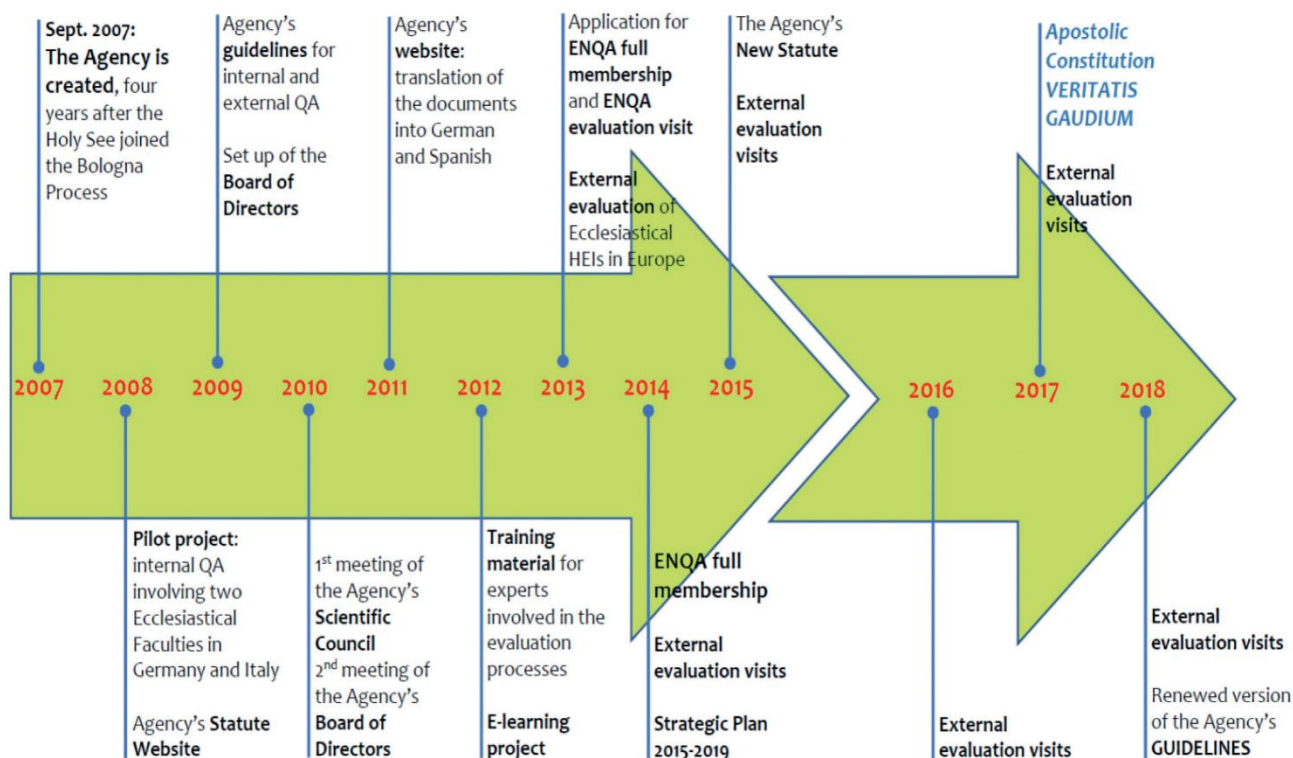## 4.4 Activities and milestones 2007-2018

Since its creation in 2007, AVEPRO has been striving to shape and consolidate its organisation and expertise so to fully commit to its global mandate.
The detailed yearly reports describe the specific measures that the Agency carried out until 2018.

The following figure provides the concise timeline highlighting the key achievements and milestones:

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[36] Eg. Projects: EQIP/Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice in European higher education and EQArep /ENQA-Transparency of European higher education through public Quality Assurance reports.
[37] It is worth mentioning also the case of Spain, where the Agency has been recognized inside a Royal Decree-Law; "Real Decreto 1619/2011, de 14 de noviembre, por el que se establece el nuevo régimen de equivalencias de los estudios y titulaciones de Ciencias Eclesiásticas de nivel universitario respecto de los títulos universitarios oficiales españoles, en cumplimiento de lo dispuesto en el Acuerdo entre el Estado español y la Santa Sede de 3 de enero de 1979 sobre Enseñanza y Asuntos Culturales".

Timeline of AVEPRO developments:

Sept. 2007: The Agency is created, four years after the Holy See joined the Bologna Process

Agency's guidelines for internal and external QA — Set up of the Board of Directors

Agency's website: translation of the documents into German and Spanish

Application for ENQA full membership and ENQA evaluation visit — **External evaluation** of Ecclesiastical HEIs in Europe

The Agency's New Statute — External evaluation visits

Apostolic Constitution VERITATIS GAUDIUM — External evaluation visits

2007 · 2008 · 2009 · 2010 · 2011 · 2012 · 2013 · 2014 · 2015 · 2016 · 2017 · 2018

Pilot project: internal QA involving two Ecclesiastical Faculties in Germany and Italy — Agency's **Statute** Website

1st meeting of the Agency's **Scientific Council** — **2nd meeting** of the Agency's **Board of Directors**

Training material for experts involved in the evaluation processes — **E-learning project**

ENQA full membership — External evaluation visits — Strategic Plan 2015-2019

External evaluation visits

External evaluation visits — Renewed version of the Agency's GUIDELINES

4.5 The PRESENT: developments, expectations and strategic planning

AVEPRO's strategic plan for 2015-2019 focuses on the consolidation of its achievements after the first ENQA coordinated review, seeking–to improve the organisation, management and realisation of its evaluation activities.

The recommendations that ENQA drafted after the first evaluation visit, and the follow-up reports have inspired and steered the initial Strategic Plan and its subsequent updates. In general terms, the strategic items upon which the 2015-2019 plan is based are:

→ the continuing improvement of the Agency's organisation and governance
→ the strengthening of self-evaluation structures and procedures (internal evaluations) in ecclesiastical Faculties/Institutions
→ the optimisation of external evaluation procedures and modes of performance, acting above all on the identification, selection and training of experts
→ the organisation of evaluation cycles on a national basis
→ the improvement of communications and institutional relations.

These are all taken into consideration in the SWOT – as current Strengths or Weaknesses, or as future opportunities and threats (see Annex 4).
Each item has its own general and specific goals and objectives, which are being pursued through *ad hoc* activities and projects.

The Agency will draft in 2020 its new Strategic Plan focussing, among other matters, also on the elements that emerged from the SWOT Analysis and on the critical issues that will be highlighted in the recommendations of the ENQA panel.

4.6 The FUTURE: challenges, expectations, risks and opportunities

The publication of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* has had an extremely significant impact on the organisation of AVEPRO, thus leading the Agency to a profound revision of its guidelines for evaluation.

The first challenge involved the need to combine the new legal basis with the ESG. The choice, made also considering AVEPRO's resources, was to bring forward the Agency's action with a specific focus on the european ecclesiastical academic Institutions. In this context, it was decided to strengthen the links between the ESG 2015 and the AVEPRO guidelines with greater clarity, focusing in particular on a principle made explicit in the ESG, that is "*Higher Education Institutions have a primary responsibility for the quality (and its Assurance) of the didactic services they provide*". This linkage between ESG and AVEPRO guidelines will have to be reconsidered in implementing evaluation procedures in non-European realities.

The Agency has aimed at extending the application of this principle to all the other activities of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions (e.g. research and "third mission"). Above all, AVEPRO has stressed the need to focus on the ability of each Institution to govern and apply its own mission liaising the strategic planning process to the evaluation process. This approach bears a twofold implication:

a. on the one hand it promotes quality through an investment in the culture of the Institution thus making the QA not a merely bureaucratic exercise but an activity of study, analysis, research, involvement and participation;

b. on the other hand, the implementation of strategic planning stimulates and puts in force the kind of institutional responsibility and maturity indicated in the above-mentioned ESG principle.

Other future challenges and expectations have been treated in Chapter 14.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus* (John Paul II, 28 June 1988)
→ *Chirographum* (Benedict XVI, 19 September 2007)
→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency
→ AVEPRO, Strategic Plan (updated version 2019)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

5. Higher Education Quality Assurance activities of the Agency

When describing AVEPRO's fields of action, consideration must be paid to both quality evaluation ("first pillar) and quality promotion ("second pillar").
Although the Agency does not have any accreditation function (which is the prerogative of the CCE), the CCE will take into account the results of the external evaluations of individual Institutions when taking its decision about accreditation.

The collaboration between AVEPRO and the CCE is achieved through two ways:

1. in a direct way, sending to the CCE all the external evaluation reports produced by AVEPRO; this allows the Holy See's "Ministry of Education" to have an updated and precise source of information on the state of the academic institution, thus facilitating decision-making;

2. in an indirect way, providing contents for the drafting of the five-year report that the Grand Chancellor has to submit to the CCE (*Veritatis gaudium,* Norms of Application, articles 9, 7). As a matter of fact, the entire corpus of documents produced throughout the evaluation process (from the SER to the strategic plan, including the external evaluation report) can be used as the main source[38] in drafting the five-year report.

As regards quality evaluation of the Holy See's Higher Education System, AVEPRO's mandate is realised through the organisation and the implementation of Institutional evaluations of the ecclesiastical Universities

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[38] See CCE/Circular Letter n° 1/2018, point 6.

and Faculties.

In particular AVEPRO's Statute specifies that the Agency (art. 5):

- *together with the academic Institutions involved, defines, develops and updates procedures for the internal and external evaluation and verification of quality, in compliance with ecclesiastical and civil, juridical and practical requirements at regional, national and international levels;*
- *plans the external verification of quality in individual academic Institutions and carries out said verification through the visits of experts, who prepare final reports following guidelines issued by the Agency itself;*
- *selects, prepares and trains experts for the external evaluation visits.*

The Agency coordinates the evaluation cycles at regional/national scale. Considering that the number of Institutions varies significantly from country to country, the Agency allows up to two years to complete an evaluation cycle at regional/national scale: for example, in Spain the full/national evaluation cycle of 23 Faculties took sixteen months (between 2016-2017).

Against this background, the Agency is committed to keep up with the ESG 2015 which state that "*external Quality Assurance of Institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis*". Academic Institutions are expected to send their Self-Evaluation Report/SER to the Agency every five years. Under specific circumstances (reforms of the HE System, new laws or specific local situations) the foreseen period of five years could be reconsidered. In any case AVEPRO makes all that is in its capacity to carry out the planned institutional evaluations every five years.

To date, the Agency has completed the following evaluation rounds[39] of the ecclesiastical Institutions throughout Europe:

EUROPE	INSTITUTIONS		FACULTIES	
	PRESENT	EVALUATED	PRESENT	EVALUATED
AUSTRIA*	9	4	10	5
BELGIUM	3	0	5	0
BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA	1	0	1	0
CROATIA	4	0	4	0
CZECH REP.	2	0	2	0
FRANCE*	8	7	15	14
GERMANY	23	0	25	0
HUNGARY	1	0	2	0
IRELAND	1	1	3	1
ITALY*	12	8	12	8
LITHUANIA*	1	1	1	1
MALTA	1	0	1	0
THE NETHERLANDS	1	0	1	0
POLAND	13	2	24	3
PORTUGAL	1	1	2	1

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[39] The large differences between the number of Institutions and the number of evaluated ones (e.g. Germany, Poland) is due to the fact that Institutions in these countries are already involved in formal accreditation procedures by the national authorities.

EUROPE	INSTITUTIONS		FACULTIES	
	PRESENT	EVALUATED	PRESENT	EVALUATED
ROME (HOLY SEE)*	27	25	57	55
SLOVAKIA	3	1	3	1
SLOVENIA	1	0	1	0
SPAIN	11	11	23	22
SWITZERLAND	4	0	4	0
UKRAINE	1	0	1	0
	128	**61**	**197**	**111**

* Nation/country where there are Institutions that are undergoing (or have already completed) the 2nd cycle of evaluation.

AVEPRO is aware that the system can be improved, especially with respect to the schedule of evaluation cycles. Nevertheless, it is the Agency's priority to enhance local networks connected with the Holy See's Higher Education System. Moreover, this strategy contributes to strengthen the other pillar of AVEPRO's activity, which is the promotion of a quality culture (point of Strength, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13)

The Agency, in its institutional capacity and statutory mandate, provides all ecclesiastical academic Institutions with the guidance, expert support and toolsets necessary to carry out quality evaluation locally. In other terms, the Agency collaborates with academic Institutions in defining internal procedures to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning, research and services, which is done through the development and use of appropriate operational tools (guidelines, questionnaires, databases, information networks, etc.). AVEPRO also organises external evaluation procedures for individual academic Institutions and arranges visits to them by experts.

As previously mentioned, the second "pillar" of AVEPRO's activity is the promotion of quality. In order to concretise this concept, (Statute art. 5) the Agency:

- *supports academic Institutions in improving the quality of their research and teaching;*
- *favours the dissemination of information in academic fields;*
- *proposes appropriate instruments for the promotion of quality.*

It is neither possible nor useful to trace a borderline between these two activities especially in the light of two scopes of the ESG ("enable the assurance and improvement of quality" and "support mutual trust facilitating recognition and mobility"). In the Agency's perspective these two purposes are related to enhancement processes which belong to the promotion of a shared cultural framework. Therefore, the promotion of quality starts with a QA process and it achieves its highest realisation when the academic Institution uses the recommendations of the external evaluation commission in order to redefine its strategic objectives. This virtuous circle combines evaluation and promotion avoiding conflict of interest because the Agency is not the body responsible for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions. Once again, the statute of the Agency defines this relationship stating that AVEPRO "*publishes the final reports, under its own authority and in compliance with Art. 12 § 1, which suggest and recommend actions to improve the Institutions evaluated*".

It is important to point out that, according to the legislation of the Holy See, the activities of *quality evaluation* and *promotion* are not related solely to teaching, learning, third mission, research but to everything that allows those who attend an ecclesiastical Faculty to be part of a "*community of study, research and formation*"[40], where *community* and *formation* represent very complex concepts.

The *former* is to be understood in the philosophical sense of "*Gemeinschaft*" or group of people who share a path in a deep, living way. The *latter* recalls the concept of integral human development[41] or the idea that authentic progress needs to embrace the whole sphere of the human being, unifying economic, cultural, relational, social, emotional and spiritual aspects. These elements contribute to define the Agency's identity and mission, representing a point of Strength (as in the SWOT analysis, Chapter 13).

In this respect, the activities of the Agency form a mechanism in which *evaluation, promotion and dissemination of the quality culture* are interrelated, and provide the backbone for the institutional evaluation of the Universities and ecclesiastical Faculties (which, as a matter of fact, represents the Agency's primary task).

► MAIN EVIDENCES
  → AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency
  → CCE/Circular Letter n° 1/2018
  → AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)
 → AVEPRO, Annual reports 2016 and 2017

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

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[40] *Veritatis gaudium*, Part One, Section Two, art. 11 §1.

[41] The concept of "integral human development" was introduced for the first time by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical "*Populorum progression*" in 1967. This vision of integral human development resonates with the direction taken by the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP in 1990: under the guidance of economists Mahbub Ul Haq and Amartya Sen, development is promoted as a "*process that broadens the range of opportunities for individuals*". The use of the Human Development Index (ISU or HDI) allows to collect meaningful data that are not limited, like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to measuring the wealth of a country in terms of income, but take into account factors such as life expectancy and education.

6. Processes and their methodologies

The process enacted for the evaluation of QA articulates in four main phases, just presented below and fully explained in Standard 2.3 (see also the table in the following section 6.2):
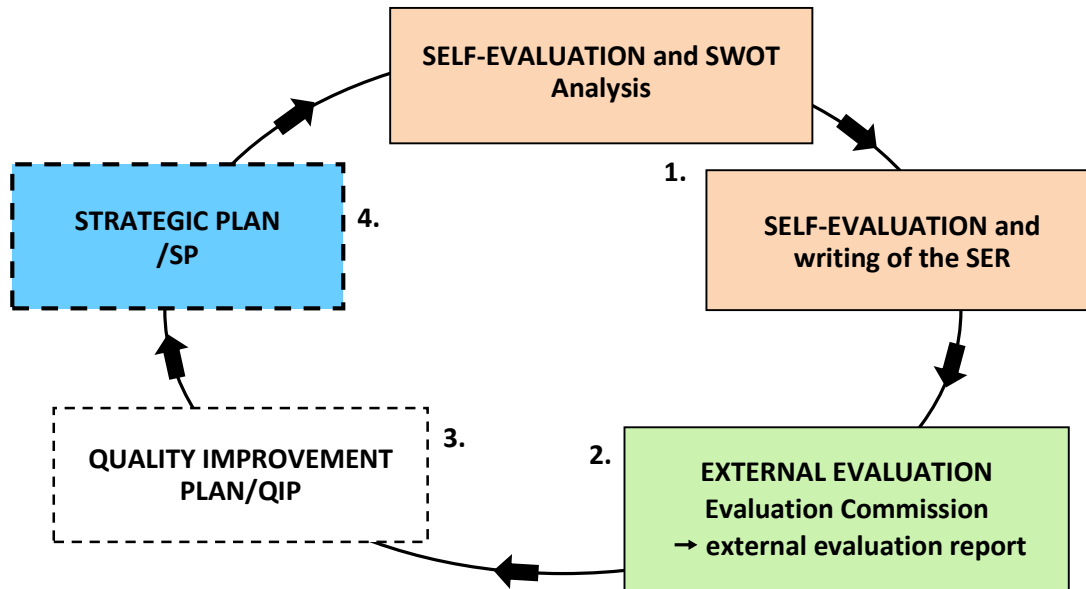
→ The Institution prepares its own Self-Evaluation Report/SER using the methodology developed by AVEPRO. This also comprises the critical analysis of the Institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (the SWOT Analysis). It fosters full understanding of what effectively characterises the Institution at the time of evaluation and provides a basis for subsequent promotion and strategic planning.

→ AVEPRO appoints an Evaluation Commission made of international experts who carefully read the SER, carry out the site visit at the Institution's premises over a number of days, and write the evaluation report.

→ Once the evaluation report is ready, the Institution is given an opportunity to view it before its delivery to AVEPRO. If the Institution finds any factual errors, misinterpretation and/or typing mistakes, then it sends a formal reply to the president of the Evaluation Commission, specifying the errors identified; the latter checks the errors and makes any necessary corrections before sending the text to AVEPRO, together with the Institution's response.

→ The President of the Evaluation Commission sends the final version of the external evaluation report to AVEPRO.

→ Following the release of the external evaluation report, the Institution prepares its renewed Quality Improvement Plan (QIP, setting the schedule for all needed improvements) and its Strategic Plan.

→ The Institution monitors the progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and, if needed, AVEPRO provides advice and support also to handle possible criticalities.

6.1 Principles adopted for institutional evaluation

The new AVEPRO guidelines have been reformulated in the light of the innovations introduced by the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* and the ESG 2015, with the aim of *ensuring a common and unitary orientation for all ecclesiastical academic Institutions both in Europe and internationally*, while maintaining a level of general applicability sufficient to respect the diversities and characteristics of the individual Institutions in their own specific contexts. Hence, the guidelines apply to the ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties in a global context.

The innovations introduced by *Veritatis gaudium* affect the criteria for the evaluation of the ecclesiastical Faculties (Art. 3): "*Through scientific research to cultivate and promote their own disciplines, i.e. those directly or indirectly connected with Christian revelation or which directly serve the mission of the Church, and therefore especially to deepen knowledge of Christian revelation and of matters connected with it, to enunciate systematically the truths contained therein, to consider in the light of revelation the most recent progress of the sciences, and to present them to the people of the present day in a manner adapted to various cultures*".

In concrete, the principles provided in *Veritatis gaudium* have been translated into evaluation criteria by the Agency, through the multiple processes that led to the final approval of the guidelines by the Board of Directors in 2018. The process started involving small groups of experts (part of them belonging to the Scientific Council and another part representing ecclesiastical academic Institution and Episcopal Conferences) who delivered some hypothesis that have been discussed, integrated and approved by the Board of Directors during its 9th meeting.

Moreover, ecclesiastical Faculties aim:

→ *to train the students to a level of high qualification in their own disciplines, according to Catholic doctrine, to prepare them properly to face their tasks, and to promote the continuing permanent education of the ministers of the Church*" (art. 3§2)

→ *to collaborate intensely, in accordance with their own nature and in close communion with the Hierarchy, with the local and the universal Church the whole work of evangelisation*" (art. 3§3).

The *Veritatis gaudium* encourages reflection on the great changes of our era and motivates us to deal with the anthropological and environmental crisis that we are experiencing, with the hope of promoting a change in our developmental model.

The ecclesiastical academic Institutions located in Europe are an integral part of the process that is seeking to harmonise the Higher Education systems across the Continent, while respecting diversity and specific characteristics. The Holy See is part of this process, implying both the expression of a political will and the creation of a "regional" system, which may also become a model of reference for ecclesiastical academic Institutions around the world (Opportunity, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

In accordance with the ESG 2015 four fundamental principles are then proposed:

1. *Higher Education Institutions have primary responsibility* for the quality (and its assurance) of the didactic services they provide;
2. *Quality Assurance takes into account the diversity* among Higher Education systems, Institutions, programmes and students;
3. Quality Assurance supports the *development of a quality culture*;
4. Quality Assurance takes into account the *needs and expectations of students*, all other *stakeholders* and *society* in general.

AVEPRO adds further principles to the above (which were already partly included in its previous documents) and grants specific importance to "*continuous improvement*", as ensured by strategic planning and the implementation of the External Evaluation Commission's recommendations.

The Agency also highlights the *centrality of students* and of *learning processes* in relation to teaching, an issue adopted within the didactic methods used in ecclesiastical academic Institutions. Considering the Agency's universal vocation, AVEPRO has updated its own guidelines, also in line with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (revised edition of 2016).

The system proposed by AVEPRO foresees a coherent quality policy based precisely on the assumption that Institutions are responsible for the development of their internal quality: with the active contribution of students, Institutions must evaluate all their activities, including study programmes, the organisation and volume of research, innovation, management, funding systems and services. Their procedures must promote academic and organisational quality, develop a culture of quality, reduce bureaucracy, have a good cost-effectiveness ratio, and avoid excessive rule-making. Consequently, external evaluation procedures should therefore ascertain, via site visits, that internal quality evaluation processes have been correct and effective.

AVEPRO is aware of the complexity of the challenges it will have to face as described in Chapter 14.

6.2 Overview of AVEPRO's methodology to evaluate Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions

The following table summarises the evaluation cycle (as resulting from good practice:

Stage/Phase	WHO /Involved organisation	WHAT /Description of activity	WHEN /Period of implementation	TOOLS provided by AVEPRO
1. SELF-EVALUATION	**INSTITUTION**	Appointment of the institutional apparatus – **Quality Committee/QC and Quality Office** – for the entire QA Process	**18 months** prior to the site visit	• Guidelines (A) "Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion" • Guidelines (B) for SELF-EVALUATION (Self-Evaluation Report/SER) • Questionnaires for self-evaluation (for teaching staff; students; service unit staff; students service unit) WORKING tool: → SER FORM (for Institution)
		Launch of **SELF-EVALUATION** and **SWOT ANALYSIS**	**12 months** prior to the site visit	
		Conclusion of SELF-EVALUATION PREPARATION of the **SER**	**6 months** prior to the site visit	
		Sending the SER to AVEPRO	**3 months** prior to the site visit	
2. EXTERNAL EVALUATION	**AVEPRO**	Appointment of the **EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION**	**At least 2 months** prior to the site visit	
	INSTITUTION	Establishment of **DATE** for site visit (contacts between the Institution and members of the Evaluation Commission)	**At least 7 weeks** prior to the site visit	
	AVEPRO	**SER** is **sent to the Evaluation Commission**	**At least 6 weeks** prior to the site visit	

Stage/Phase	WHO /Involved organisation	WHAT /Description of activity	WHEN /Period of implementation	TOOLS provided by AVEPRO
2. EXTERNAL EVALUATION	**EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION**	• **ANALYSIS of the SER** (using SER analysis FORM) • **Exchange of ideas** regarding unanswered questions and issues to be dealt with during the site visit (among Commission members)	**From 6 weeks** prior to the site visit	• Training for experts (e-learning programme) • Guidelines (A) "Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion" • Guidelines (C) for EXTERNAL EVALUATION • Sample site visit programme WORKING tools: → SER analysis FORM (for External Evaluation Commission) → Evaluation report TEMPLATE (for External Evaluation Commission)
	INSTITUTION	Organisation of the Evaluation Commission's **travel and logistical arrangements**	**5 weeks** prior to the site visit	
	INSTITUTION and EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION	Definition of a **SCHEDULE** for the visit	**5 weeks** prior to the site visit	
	EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION	**SITE VISIT**	**By 6 weeks** after the end of the visit	
		Evaluation Commission draws up the **EVALUATION REPORT**		
		FINAL DRAFT of the evaluation report is sent to the Institution by the President of the Evaluation Commission		
	INSTITUTION	Any factual corrections to the evaluation report are **sent to the President of the Evaluation Commission** within 2 weeks of receipt of the Report → In the case of objections deemed substantial by the Institution, appeal regarding the contents of the Report (see the dedicated section of this document and point 4.4 of the AVEPRO guidelines)	**Within 8 weeks** after the end of the site visit (within 2 weeks of receipt of the Report) → in the case of appeal against the Report, the timeline changes	
	EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION	The President of the Evaluation Commission **sends the evaluation report to AVEPRO** (definitive version)	**Within 8 weeks** after the end of the site visit	
	AVEPRO	The **evaluation report is sent to the authorities**: the CCE, the Grand Chancellor and any other academic authorities (Dean, Head, Rector), then **published on the Agency's website**	**Within 10 weeks** after the end of the site visit	

Stage/Phase	WHO /Involved organisation	WHAT /Description of activity	WHEN /Period of implementation	TOOLS provided by AVEPRO
3. and **4. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** and **STRATEGIC PLANNING**	**INSTITUTION**	Preparation of the **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN/QIP**	**Within 6 months** after the end of the site visit	• Guidelines (A) "Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion" • Guidelines (D) on Strategic Planning
		Preparation and approval of the **STRATEGIC PLAN/SP**	**Within 12 months** after the end of the site visit	
		ANNUAL UPDATE of the SP	**Every year**	
		Confirmation or appointment of the members of the **Quality Committee and Quality Office**	**At least 18 months prior** to the new site visit	

6.3 Selection and appointment of members of Evaluation Commissions (External experts)

AVEPRO keeps an updated roster/database of academicians and professionals to be selected and appointed for the external Evaluation Commissions.

Individuals with a well reputed academic career – usually former Deans, or former Rectors, or full professors – can be included in the roster following one of these procedures:

→ Self-application or spontaneous application
→ Suggestion from the Board of Directors
→ Suggestion from the Scientific Council
→ Suggestion from a Higher Education Institution.

Each *curriculum vitae et studiorum* is analysed (hearing also the CCE) and then the candidate's profile is entered into the database. Specific tagging is applied with respect to individual specialty and preferred working language, so to facilitate the future search and matching. The experts are appointed for a period of five years, during which they can be selected for one or two site visits.

When a site visit is planned, AVEPRO proceeds with the set-up of an External Evaluation Commission. Members are "extracted" from the database in consideration of criteria such as: skills in the field of QA; technical/professional competences; language skills; managerial skills. The composition of the Commissions varies according to the size of the Institution to be evaluated, but in general it comprises a President, one student and one or more "thematic" experts.

The criteria used to form the Commission seek to ensure, as far as possible, the presence of experts with "technical" competence, i.e. experts in the subject or subjects that characterise the Institution's teaching and research. Moreover, efforts are made to use experts who are familiar with management and leadership practices, as well as knowledge of the main processes and procedures of Quality Assurance.

Lastly, considering the international vocation of the Holy See's Higher Education system, efforts are made to appoint a President of a different nationality from the country where the Institution is located, who also possesses the necessary linguistic competence to read and comprehend the SER and interact easily with the academic community during the visit.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

7. Agency's internal Quality Assurance

AVEPRO's internal QA policy derives from what it is stated in Article 12 of its Statute and it is based on the following principles:

- *inclusion*,
- *critical analysis,*
- *openness* and
- *feedback*.

The concept of *internal* is to be understood in an extensive manner thus including various stakeholders who, in an open and interdependent system, offer the Agency elements useful to start review processes of procedures and/or activities.

The internal QA procedures performed by AVEPRO provide for a multi-level system in which aspects such as: *institutional*, *strategic* and *operational governance* are assessed and evaluated.
It is to be recalled that AVEPRO's internal QA is inspired by the Europe-wide action that ENQA has been carrying out for years, activating also other QA Agencies in a true spirit of exchange and peer learning. Furthermore, AVEPRO is also participating in the European University Association's measures to promote quality, sharing the same principle that "*the main responsibility for Quality Assurance lies within Higher Education Institutions*".[42]

In this respect, the *AVEPRO's internal QA system provides tools/templates and procedures* that the staff uses to plan, organise and keep track of the Agency's activities and relevant events. For example, the following tools are regularly utilised: agenda templates for weekly staff meetings; roadmaps; suggestions for networking and partnership building; notice boards for training opportunities and other events.
This set of tools and procedures makes it possible to plan and implement the following:

➤ INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE

→ Design of the *processes and procedures for self-assessment* in accordance with participation in international associations (as provided for by the Statute).

→ *Information and documentation supporting accountability towards the stakeholders* and their *full involvement* (e.g. the meeting held in 2015 with all the Rome-based ecclesiastical academic Institutions; Participation in the Commission on the implementation of the *Veritatis gaudium*; meetings organised for the dissemination of the contents of *Veritatis gaudium*: Rome, May 2018; Bangkok, May 2018; Bogotá, November 2018; Nairobi 2019).

➤ STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE

→ *Compliance with the General Rules of the Roman Curia* (in force for all the Institutions of the Holy See).

→ Development of *reports of the activities*, which are sent each year to the Secretariat of State and to the CCE.

→ Drawing up of the *"Forecasting and reporting package"* to be sent to the Secretariat for Economy (that elaborates and implements the financial management policies).

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[42] From the EUA's website.

➢ *Involvement of the Agency's Boards* for the definition of the guidelines and verification of the results of the Agency's work (envisaged in the Statute).

➢ Development of the *Strategic plan* with constant monitoring, drafting of reports and updates presented to each Board of Directors.

❯ OPERATIONAL GOVERNANCE

➢ *Fine-tuning of the guidelines and the related tools*.

➢ *Drawing up of the Board of Directors' activity reports.*

➢ *Organisation and tracking of the weekly staff meetings*.

➢ Implementation of *informal feedback mechanisms* and agency meetings.

➢ Realisation of *periodic surveys* involving all European ecclesiastical Faculties, and drafting of a summary report as practical feedback form (started in 2019).

➢ Realisation *on a yearly basis of the President's evaluation of the staff*.

➢ Study visits for training and exchange.

In the Section dealing with AVEPRO's compliance with the ESG Standard 3.6 more details and examples are provided.

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ General Rules of the Roman Curia/Regolamento generale della Curia Romana (30 April 1999)
→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency
→ AVEPRO, Briefing and Agendas 2018-2019
→ AVEPRO, Annual Reports 2014-2019

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

8. The Agency's international activities

As already described in § 4.3, the Agency:

• operates on the global scale, providing its promotion and evaluation services to all ecclesiastical academic Institutions located in the five continents;

• in its capacity, collaborates with all actors interested in the life and progress of ecclesiastical universities and Faculties: the Institutions themselves, the CCE, the Episcopal Conferences, regional, national and international authorities, and those who work in the various dioceses of countries in which ecclesiastical academic Institutions are based;

• participates in fora and working groups with an international standing, so to learn and to contribute to the overall advancement of Quality Assurance systems for HEIs.

Keeping in mind that each country requests specific attention by AVEPRO in setting up the evaluation process, during this 10 years of experience the Agency has developed different approaches, according to the local context. The first element that AVEPRO takes into consideration is the number of ecclesiastical academic Institutions in the country. If the number is relevant (e.g. more than 10 academic Institutions) the Agency contacts the local Episcopal Conference (e.g. in Italy, Poland and Spain) in order to collect practical information about the legal framework and the local Higher Education "landscape". If requested by the Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Austria, France, Poland, Slovenia), AVEPRO explores the possibility to collaborate with the local/national QA agency, for diverse activities ranging from coordination of the

evaluation schedule to joint evaluations.

AVEPRO adapts its methodological frameworks to and follows the main findings of several international projects, in order to keep its QA processes in line with the best practices in Europe; it also maintains its international presence with the intention of contributing to the development of new frameworks for the EHEA. The Agency's international dimension is developed through different types of activities. Concerning Institutional relations, AVEPRO cooperates mainly at European level with agencies and entities aimed at providing added value to the Higher Education system. In this respect, the Agency:

1. Has been a full member of ENQA since 2014. Its representatives have taken part in the recent ENQA General Assemblies and different events.

2. Is involved in the EQAF/European Quality Assurance Forum; it participates in conference's and training workshops.

3. Monitors the events organised by INQAAHE.

4. Has established bilateral relations with a few QA Agencies located in Europe (e.g. Austria. Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden) to define modes of cooperation on specific issues especially focused on the promotion of quality culture and the possible participation in future common projects[43].

5. Is actively collaborating with the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU, located in Paris), specifically on topics related to training of HEIs' staff on quality issues.

6. In 2018 the Agency's representatives took part in the UNESCO Regional Consultation Meeting for Western Europe, organised in partnership with Quality Assurance agencies and relevant regional or global organisations.

7. Is committed to provide advice and support to exchange programmes implying mobility schemes for staff and students, considered as a key element of the Bologna Process. It is worth mentioning that networks already exist among ecclesiastical academic Institutions, built on common academic interests, as well as on long-lasting worldwide relationships within Religious Orders. Furthermore, in some Institutions the ratio of foreign students can reach up to 75% (as in the case of most Rome-based pontifical Universities). This "natural" mobility ratio is also due to the fact that most enrolled students are clerics coming from all over the world.

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ Conventio/Agreement between the HOLY SEE and the Republic of Lithuania on co-operation in education and culture
→ *Chirographum* (Benedict XVI, 19 September 2007)
→ NAKVIS-AVEPRO Memorandum of understanding
→ AVEPRO, Follow Up Reports on ENQA Site Visit (2014 and 2016)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

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[43] See also § 4.3.

9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies – ESG 2015 (Part 3)

9.1 ESG Standard 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for Quality Assurance

STANDARD:
Agencies should undertake external Quality Assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Compliance by AVEPRO

AVEPRO pursues the mission of promoting and developing a culture of quality within the academic Institutions that depend directly on the Holy See and ensuring they possess internationally valid quality criteria, as established by the Bologna Process[44].

The Agency's mission is translated into a strategy that inspires regular operations. Two key papers explain the QA framework and principles adopted by AVEPRO:

a. the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 (in the process of being updated for the following period of five years);

b. the "Guidelines: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)".[45]

The Strategic Plan and the guidelines are published on the Agency's website so to ensure transparency, visibility and universal access.

In its Strategic Plan, the Agency determines the "roadmap" to be implemented in the given timeline. In particular, the following elements are set:

• the Agency's organisational structure;

• the governance principles and formal bodies;

• the Agency's positioning vis-à-vis other national/regional QA agencies;

• the steps to be taken in order to strengthen the self-evaluation structures and procedures (internal evaluations) in Higher Education Institutions;

• the improvement of external evaluation procedures and modes of performance, such as the drafting of revised guidelines and templates;

• the organisation of evaluation cycles on a regional/national basis, defining locations, schedules and procedures;

• the Agency's communication and institutional relations, at EU and global scale;

• the improvement of relations with stakeholders.

The state of implementation of the Strategic Plan is assessed on a yearly basis by the Board of Directors/BoD. The Agency's Secretariat, under the supervision of the Director, prepares a brief about what has been realised and what needs to be carried out, together with possible emerging needs. The Plan is discussed and analysed. The updated Plan is amended following the BoD's recommendations.

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[44] The full text of the Agency's mission is available on its website, in the section AVEPRO > Mission.

[45] This document is part of a set of five guidelines proposed by the Agency and constitutes an initial general document which contextualizes the whole quality evaluation process. The other guidelines deal more in-depth with the topics introduced in this essential first document.

AVEPRO's guidelines: A. Guidelines: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of quality evaluation and promotion; B. Guidelines for Self-Evaluation; C. Guidelines for External Evaluation; D. Guidelines on Strategic Planning; E. Ecclesiastical higher education system in the global world - Rationales of AVEPRO evaluation system.

The AVEPRO's Guidelines represent the *vade mecum* for the ecclesiastical academic Institutions, as well as for the External Evaluation Commissions and the Agency itself. The methodologies designed by the Agency are aligned with the purpose and objectives of the reviews, while also serving as professional guide for those who participate in internal and external review processes, so that the ensuing conclusions and recommendations are the result of a coherent and consistent method of work.

Although it is up to the CCE to grant accreditation to an Institution, the evaluation reports play an important role in the accreditation process. Therefore, it is important that an appeal procedure is provided in order to facilitate interrelationship between the Agency and the units being evaluated (as further explained in § 10.7).

Quality Assurance takes into account the *needs and expectations of stakeholders*. In the Agency's practices, *stakeholders* are considered as a key player that can contribute to shaping the concept of quality in higher education. It recognises the role of *internal stakeholders*, such as teachers, students or university employees, and *external stakeholders* such as authorities, Religious Orders, Episcopal Conferences and other Institutions. The relevance of stakeholders' contribution is proved, for instance, by students' participation in the Agency's bodies (Board of Directors and Scientific Council).

As regards *internal stakeholders*, students are considered as the centre of the academic life, bringing forward the principles of student-centred learning and teaching. Students' representatives participate actively in the self-evaluation process carried out by academic Institutions (internal evaluation) and are involved in the meeting with the External Evaluation Commissions. The same kind of participation is required to university's staff, too. Their viewpoints are taken into great consideration when evaluating an Institution's services, structures and processes in a quality perspective (as it is promoted with the periodic survey launched in January 2019).

As regards *external stakeholders*, meetings take place at different levels, depending on the themes to be discussed and the nature of the stakeholder. For instance, the Agency's President and Director meet the Secretary of the CCE and the other officials on a quarterly basis. With the Episcopal Conferences and local ecclesiastical academic Institutions meetings are scheduled following the path of evaluation (set-up, training of evaluation experts, conclusions and follow-up).

Many examples can help comprehend *external stakeholders' involvement and trust* in the implementation of the Agency's QA policies. Practically, the Agency took the strategic decision to organise evaluation cycles on regional/national basis sharing the proposal of academic Institutions themselves and national Episcopal Conferences, which have to comply, in some cases, with specific local legal requirements. In this context, local QA Agencies become relevant stakeholders.
Another example refers to the linkage between evaluation process and strategic planning as foreseen in the new version of the Guidelines. In 2015, after the evaluation of part of the Rome-based ecclesiastical academic Institutions, the Faculties, Universities and Athenaeums, together with the Superiors of Religious Orders, posed a question about how they would "use" the results of the evaluation so to foster future strategic developments. As a consequence, the Religious Order named "Servants of Mary" took the decision to use the results of the evaluation with the aim of defining the future developments of the Pontifical Theological Faculty "*Marianum*". The document is to be presented in October 2019 during the CCXIV General Chapter of the Order of the Servants of Mary (the highest governing body of the Religious Order).

Furthermore, advisors support AVEPRO in monitoring and reviewing its operations, checking their consistency with the Agency's strategic planning.

The AVEPRO's Guidelines imply that independent experts are involved in specific activities, as members of the External Evaluation Commissions. Their independence and objectivity are meant to accrue expertise and reliability. At least one international expert (usually the President) is appointed in the external Evaluation Commissions. As described in § 6.3 "Selection and appointment of members of Evaluation Commissions (External experts)" and in § 10.4 "ESG Standard 2.4: Peer-review experts", AVEPRO keeps an updated

roster/database of academicians and professionals to be selected and appointed.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.1

► The Agency's operations have consolidated and further developed, in line with the notion of "continuous improvement", with revised official acts (as the Agency's new Statute), updated guidelines (as the revised general Guidelines and the specific Guidelines tackling single evaluation phases), and widely accessible web tools.

► The Agency's multiannual Strategic Plan is accessible to the broad public on its website. The disclosure of its vision, mission, aims, processes and procedures goes hand-in-glove with the Agency's priority to assure transparency and accountability.

► The Agency needs to improve its communication strategy (Weakness, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13) in order to assure fruitful collaboration with local stakeholders. This would permit to overcome problems related to languages, organizations, logistics and legal frameworks.

► The constant work to strengthen the engagement of internal stakeholders is delivering its results: the gradually increasing participation of students and university staff in the evaluation processes is providing original proposals and standpoints to be considered by academic Institutions. The Agency is aware that there is room for improvement with respect to the participation of all the actors involved in HEIs' communities.

► Stakeholders' proposals are taken into account when revising and updating processes and practices.

► The involvement of independent international experts has become a distinctive feature of the external evaluation process which enhances the reliability of the evaluation results. Following a standardised procedure (see § 6.3), qualified professionals are selected and appointed to be part of external Evaluation Commissions for a given period.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)

→ AVEPRO, Strategic Plan (updated version 2019)

→ CCXIV General Chapter of the Order of the Servants of Mary (October 2019) Commission on the Pontifical Theological Faculty "*Marianum*"

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

→ AVEPRO, The Regional/National procedure model

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

9.2 ESG Standard 3.2: Official status

STANDARD:
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as Quality Assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Compliance by AVEPRO

Since its creation in 2007, AVEPRO has had a clear standing within the Holy See's institutional framework. The Agency was erected by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI through an official document (named "chirograph" or "*chirographum*" in Latin) signed on 19 September 2007. The Agency was recognised the status of Institution linked to the Holy See, according to the rules defined in art. 186 and 190-191 of the Apostolic constitution "*Pastor bonus*" (1988). These articles state that within the framework of the Holy See's Institutional architecture "There *are certain institutes, some of ancient origin and some not long established, which do not belong to the Roman Curia in a strict sense but nevertheless provide useful or necessary services*

to the Supreme Pontiff himself, to the Curia and the whole Church, and are in some way connected with the Apostolic See" (art. 186). "*In their constitution and administration, all these Institutions of the Roman Church are governed by their own laws*" (art. 190). Being part of a national system, even if the Agency and all the Institutions connected to the Holy See are independent, "*these institutes, according to their own regulations, come within the competence of the Secretariat of State or of other agencies of the Roman Curia*" (art. 191).

With the 2018 Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* the Agency's mandate, characteristics and tasks are improved Art. 1. § 2 of the "Norms of application" reads as follows: "*Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, as well as other institutions of higher education, are usually subjected to the evaluation of the Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality (AVEPRO)*".

As regards its internal regulatory framework, the Agency is regulated by its Statute (revised in 2015), which determines that the Agency is endowed with a canonical public juridical personality and Vatican civil juridical personality (art. 1, §4) and has its registered office in the Vatican City State (§5).

As already stated, AVEPRO's activities are global and this aspect generates concrete implications with respect to the "legal" dimension; the Agency conducts its activities in compliance with international conventions, agreements and initiatives which the Holy See adheres to.

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FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.2

► The Agency has been acquiring a stronger role through the years. The 2018 Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* confirms its mandate in promoting a quality culture throughout the Holy See's academic system.

► The Agency conducts its activities in compliance with international conventions, agreements and initiatives which the Holy See adheres to, also beyond the EHEA.

► The Agency's worldwide recognition is opening up interesting challenges with respect to the dissemination of its quality approach at the global scale.

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► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ *Chirographum* (Benedict XVI, 19 September 2007)

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

→ Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus* (John Paul II, 28 June 1988)

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

→ AVEPRO, Report on the questionnaire 2019

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

9.3 ESG Standard 3.3: Independence

STANDARD:
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Compliance by AVEPRO

AVEPRO's organisational independence derives from the 2017 Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, where the role of the Agency with respect to quality evaluation is stated (art. 1, § 2, "Norms of application"). Its independence is then defined and granted in its Statute, art. 2: "*While complying with the canonical provisions in force and the international agreements on the subject of Higher Education to which the Holy See is a party, the Agency enjoys autonomy in its performance of the activities provided for in this Statute. To this end it develops, updates and implements appropriate measures and procedures for the attainment of*

institutional goals".

All the Agency's leading bodies (President, Board of Directors and Scientific Council) are directly appointed by the Pope, acting as Head of State and thus granting the highest level of autonomy and legitimisation (as in Can. 331 of the CIC).

All of the Agency's operations are inspired by this notion of independence, which is substantiated in its autonomous governance framework, budgeting functions (budgeting, budget management and reporting), and transparent procedures (Organisational independence). The Agency also operates autonomously in relation to its two main activities, as defined in its mission statement, namely the *evaluation and promotion of Quality*.

With respect to financial issues, details are provided in § 9.5.

Taking into consideration the independence of formal outcomes, AVEPRO plans and implements autonomously the activities for the evaluation of quality. It establishes direct contacts with ecclesiastical academic Institutions to set up specific evaluation deeds; it liaises with local stakeholders (e.g. the Episcopal Conferences, the Rectors' Conferences; local Associations of students of ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, etc.); it takes all steps to arrange external evaluations (e.g. it appoints experts as members of the External Evaluation Commissions). The Agency's evaluation procedures and methods are public and available on its website.

In addition, AVEPRO offers a full set of learning resources and toolsets that allow experts and other profiles to familiarise with the specific procedures (e.g. the e-learning training that is provided to experts; the supporting documents to analyse the self-evaluation reports of ecclesiastical academic Institutions; the tools to support evaluation commissions in the preparation of reports). The outcomes of institutional evaluations are the sole responsibility of AVEPRO.

Moreover, the Agency plans and implements autonomously the activities for the promotion of quality. It sets the strategic objectives (i.e. in the multiannual Strategic Plan) to disseminate the quality culture at global scale, selecting the continents and the countries where ecclesiastical academic Institutions show a greater need for awareness-raising, in-depth information and promotion activities. It defines the detailed work plan and makes arrangements for the participation of its executives in national and international events.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.3

► Since its creation in 2007, AVEPRO has been acting in autonomy from other Institutions of the Holy See, still maintaining with them fruitful links for collaboration and consultation.

► The new Statute – which entered into force in 2015 – stresses the Agency's independence, in particular with respect to: strategic planning; budgeting and financial management and the definition of its operations.

► After more than 10 years of activity, the independence of the Agency is a fact. The first review by ENQA had already recognised the full compliance of AVEPRO with respect to this standard. The present moment and the challenges for the future oblige us to "transform" the independence into inter-dependence with other stakeholders in order to constantly increase the culture of quality within the system of Higher Education of the Holy See.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

→ Code of Canon Law

→ AVEPRO, Follow Up Reports on ENQA Site Visit (2014 and 2016)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

9.4 ESG Standard 3.4: Thematic analysis

STANDARD:
Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external Quality Assurance activities.

Compliance by AVEPRO

According to its mission, a great deal of AVEPRO's activities are aimed at the *promotion of Quality*. This implies all those measures that have an impact on the entire Higher Education System, thus involving various actors and different levels of responsibility. For this reason, over the years the Agency has taken care of the preparation of several reports containing analyses, reflections, recommendations and operational proposals addressed to and shared with:

- ecclesiastical academic Institutions
- governing authorities, such as the CCE
- Orders, Episcopal Conferences
- experts involved in Evaluation Commissions.

The reports can be grouped into three different areas:

1. Analysis of self-assessment reports and external evaluation reports
2. Summary of evaluations by regional/national area
3. Working papers and publications on specific topics.

For reasons of privacy, neither the self-evaluation reports developed by academic Institutions nor the analysis of the self-evaluation reports are published.

The full external evaluation reports are regularly published and are available on the Agency's website,[46] in the section "evaluation reports".

This valuable documentation is mostly used, on the one hand, by the members of the different External Evaluation Commissions (who consider these reports as "reference materials" to improve their own understanding), and on the other hand, by the academic Institutions (which can have a "benchmark system" to check their own context).

1. ➡ The first group of thematic analyses, "Analysis of self-assessment reports and external evaluation reports", includes the 2012-2014 and 2014-2016 reports in which about 80 SARs and as many external evaluation reports are analysed, whose conclusions are addressed to the Agency, to the Evaluation Commissions and to the academic Institutions evaluated.
This analytical work has contributed significantly to the revision of the evaluation system proposed by the Agency, and it has determined the definition of operational tools and formats for use by both the Institutions and the Evaluation Commissions. It has also contributed to the identification of themes to be further analysed and discussed in specific working papers.

2. ➡ The second group of documents, "Summary of assessments by regional/national area", contains analyses and reports relating to specific geographical areas in which the evaluation process has been carried out. At the time, the Agency has produced reports about Italy, Rome (which is a unique case, with the highest

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[46] In the section "Evaluation Report", where Reports are listed from newest to oldest.

concentration of ecclesiastical Faculties in a single area) and Spain. These documents describe the peculiarities that emerged in the region, highlight areas of attention and are mainly aimed at stakeholders who operate in that specific area. They also help the Agency, the CCE and the Secretariat of State to better understand the local situations and adapt approaches and interactions with local stakeholders with regard to the Higher Education system and policies.

The service that the Agency offers to the stakeholders with the support of these reporting activities has relevant effects on a twofold level:

- on the one hand, it allows the governing authorities to have a more coordinated vision concerning the progress of the Higher Education system of the Holy See in a particular country;
- on the other hand, this allows national/regional Institutions to have a broader understanding of their conditions, as highlighted in their self-evaluation activities. They can realise that they are part of a complex context where other Institutions share similar problems and face similar challenges.

It is worth mentioning that those analyses and reports have significantly contributed to the development of a "model by country" or geographical area as a benchmark useful for organising the evaluation process. The strength of this model is its wide and open involvement of potential local stakeholders (National QA Agency, Ministry, Rectors' Conferences, Episcopal Conferences, Apostolic Nunciatures[47] as well as the academic Institutions themselves).
The most relevant impacts of these activities have been:

→ in Rome: start of a process of redefinition and optimisation of the Higher Education Institutions that operate in the area;

→ in Italy: cooperation with the local Episcopal Conference aimed at reducing the number of HIRS operating in the country. This process has resulted in the reduction of around 50% of their numbers;

→ in Spain: the creation of a discussion forum where common problems are analysed, suggestions are defined and presented to the competent authorities.

3. ➡ The third group of documents, "Working papers and publications on specific topics", articulates in three different sections (all attached to this SAR, as evidences and references in Annex 1):

a. *Reports on the activities carried out by the Agency*. This section comprises the reports that the Agency (in compliance with the provisions of the Statutes) forwards to the Secretariat of State and to the CCE every year. The same report, drawn up solely for descriptive purposes, is published on the Agency's website.

b. *Working papers*. These are a sort of *experiment* which has opened up interesting challenges, dealing with themes that we could almost define as "peripheral" with respect to AVEPRO's Institutional activity. Fundamental in the elaboration of these reports was the stimulus coming from Stakeholders, in particular from the ecclesiastical academic Institutions that invited the Agency to elaborate some reference papers on urgent topics, i.e. strategic planning or possible evolutions of the organisation of the III cycle. The impact generated by these works has been extremely significant for all parties involved, making strategic planning an integral part of the evaluation model proposed by AVEPRO.
Another relevant example in this category refers to the survey[48] launched in January 2019 and involving all the European ecclesiastical Faculties. With the twofold objective of collecting Faculties' views and suggestions about (a) the role and centrality of the student in their study programmes, and (b) the expectations that Universities and Faculties have towards AVEPRO, the Agency proposed a new shared method for communication and exchange, to be regularly "nurtured" with surveys to be repeated at least on an annual basis. Shortly after collecting the data from questionnaires, the Agency produced a summary that has been sent to all the European Institutions involved with the survey. There have been several positive feedbacks after that, and many stakeholders showed interest in a deeper and cross

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[47] An Apostolic Nunciature is a diplomatic mission of the Holy See, equivalent to an embassy.
[48] See Annex 1.

analysis of the data.

c. *Articles and texts on specific topics*. The Agency is very keen on disseminating key themes characterizing the Holy See's academic system, involving high-profile experts coming from different sectors.

For the 10th Anniversary of the Agency, an entire volume of *Educatio catholica*[49] has been devoted to AVEPRO and the promotion and evaluation of quality inside the ecclesiastical Institutions. It is a body of 17 articles written by international experts that covers multiple aspects, from the Bologna Process to the relationship between the Agency, the ecclesiastical academic Institutions and the actors within the system. The Agency's experiences were reviewed and reconsidered also by non-European experts,[50] thus underlining the universal vocation and the uniqueness of the evaluation process implemented by AVEPRO.

There are also papers and writings prepared to disseminate the innovations introduced by the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* in different contexts (e.g. meetings with groups of stakeholders, thematic event organised by Institutions, journals, etc.).
It is worth mentioning here an article published in *Salesianum*[51] which analyses the common grounds between the *Veritatis gaudium* and the Holy See's quality approach.

These documents and reports address the needs and *desiderata* of the Agency's stakeholders, in an attempt to strengthen inter-institutional and inter-organisational *liaisons* and to consolidate a common vision about Quality Assurance.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.4

► With reference to the previous evaluation (2014) and to the former Standard 2.8 "System-wide analysis", the documentation and reports that the Agency produces represent a *crucial point of synthesis* as well as a *launchpad* for further activities and continuous improvement processes. In this respect, such reports and documentation contain the elements for the ongoing evaluation and appreciation of the Agency's outcomes.

► These contents, being addressed to the broad public of experts and interested parties, make it possible to communicate a complete and transparent vision of what is going on and what is being achieved.

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ CCE, *Educatio Catholica* 3/2017 "Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality"
→ LAS, *Salesianum* 1/LXXXI/2019 (*ianuarius-martius*) "*Veritatis gaudium*", Riccardo Cinquegrani "Quality in relation to certain challenges introduced by *Veritatis gaudium*"
→ AVEPRO, Analysis of the external evaluation reports 2014-2017
→ AVEPRO, Analysis of evaluation reports 2012-2014
→ AVEPRO, Evaluation of the HE Ecclesiastical Institutions located in Rome (2015)
→ AVEPRO, Report on the questionnaire 2019
→ AVEPRO, Summary of evaluation activities conducted at the Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions present in Spain 2016-2018

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[49] *Educatio catholica* (The Catholic Education) is the Congregation for Catholic Education's institutional journal published quarterly. It focusses on issues closely related to the competences of the Congregation, therefore dealing in depth and in a competent manner with both education in a general sense and school, professional and university education. *Educatio catholica* 3/2017 "Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality".

[50] Cfr. *Educatio catholica* 3/2017, Concluding remarks: an assessment of the Bologna Process and QA system from different perspectives. This part is composed by 4 articles stating perspectives from the USA, Asia, Latin America and Australia.

[51] *Salesianum* is the Pontifical Salesian University institutional bimonthly journal published since 1940. LAS, *Salesianum* 1/LXXXI/2019 (*ianuarius-martius*) *Veritatis gaudium*, Riccardo Cinquegrani "La qualità di fronte ad alcune sfide introdotte dalla *Veritatis gaudium*"/"Quality in the face of some challenges introduced by the *Veritatis gaudium*".

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

9.5 ESG Standard 3.5: Resources

STANDARD:
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

Compliance by AVEPRO

The issue of the Agency's resources is crucial because:

1. the availability of resources contributes to determining the Agency's credibility and operational capacity to achieve the objectives defined by its mission, and

2. it has a direct impact on the strategies and applied methods also in relation to the QA processes.

Pope Francis has initiated a profound path of reorganisation of the Roman Curia since the first year of his Pontificate. This has led to several innovations some of which have had effects on the Agency itself. Particularly relevant for the present Standard, it is to be mentioned the *motu proprio* establishing the Secretariat for the Economy (2014), adopting financial management policies based on international standards (especially the International Public Sector Accounting Standards/IPSAS) in all the bodies and departments of the Holy See.

In this scenario of reform, the Agency has managed to consolidate its standing as regards both financial provisions and personnel. Reorganisation and optimisation have had interesting implications for AVEPRO: whilst in 2015 the agency could count on two full-time employees and an open-ended employee (see 2015 follow-up report), and a budget of approximately 209.000 euro, at present its staff comprises four full-time positions with permanent contracts; the profile of a fifth position is under definition. The Secretariat is also supported by two part-time advisors. The budget is approximately 337.000 euro. The Agency sends every three months a forecast of activities and expenditures to the Secretariat for the Economy. In that occasion, if unplanned activities have to be implemented, the Agency can ask for additional financial resources. These data have to be considered keeping in mind that due to the Lateran Pacts the Holy See has a special tax system.

AVEPRO has been supported by expert advisors (acting for free) involved on specific strategic and operational issues. It is also worth recalling that the 2015 Statute assigns the members of the Councils "operational" tasks, thus guaranteeing the Agency the support of highly specialised technical and managerial skills and prestige in the field of Higher Education.

A further valuable resource for the Agency is represented by the members of the external Evaluation Commissions. These are experts, usually scholars, academics and students representing also other Higher Education Institutions not related to the Holy See. For the evaluation activities they offer their competence and time for free; in this way, it is possible for AVEPRO not to charge any cost to the Academic Institutions being evaluated.

Moreover, as mentioned, the Agency's Board of Directors and the Scientific Council offer their technical and managerial skills for free.

The Boards, the experts, the President, the Director and the staff of the Agency are indicated in art. 6 of the AVEPRO's Statute "Agency bodies and staff" and are therefore to be considered as the Agency's resources in their own right.

Therefore, the Agency's organisational model is multi-level and multi-actor. This means that the Agency can count on resources not physically located in Via della Conciliazione 5 but shared with other Institutions and

agencies outside the borders of the Vatican City.

On a practical level this has determined that multiple stakeholders contribute to the development of the Agency. By way of example, it is possible to mention: the National Episcopal Conferences (which are committed to provide for logistical support for meetings, training seminars, coverage of minor expenses), the Religious Orders and the Academic Institutions themselves (they also offer to the Agency spaces in which to organise meetings or institutional networking opportunities).[52]

Other Institutions, such as the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU – FIUC), have supported AVEPRO by providing (and bearing the cost of) professional translators, who have contributed to realising the Spanish and French versions of the website.

Other "intangible" resources are mobilised, such as networking at national and international level, leading to collaboration activities with other Agencies associated to ENQA. These networks represent valuable resources that facilitate the work of AVEPRO to achieve the principles to which the ESG 2015 are inspired.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.5

► Since the acquisition of full membership in ENQA, the Agency's human and financial resources have increased. This aspect is in contrast with respect to the general trend of public Institutions in the field of education and also with respect to the reform process underway in the Holy See.

► The Agency can count on internal resources but also on networks that in various capacities collaborate with AVEPRO or offer their availability, advice and support. Cooperation with various stakeholders, engagement and other intangibles represent the most valuable resources of the Agency, with the idea of being at the service of a greater Good.

► Available financial resources are not corresponding to the Agency's corresponding tasks (Weakness, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

► If the budget does not increase, this may generate obstacles for the Agency's future actions especially in non-European countries (Threat, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

► The Agency is aware that increasing the available financial resources would have a positive impact on AVEPRO's activities. However, to date evaluations have been carried out in 9 different European countries and processes have been launched, as suggested by Pope Francis in the *Apostolic exhortation evangelii gaudium* of 24 November 2013 at number 223: "*This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation* […]. *What we need, then, to give priority to actions which generate new societies. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity*".

► MAIN EVIDENCES
  → AVEPRO, Experts database
  → *Motu proprio* (apostolic letter issued *motu proprio), Fidelis dispensator et prudens* (Francis, 24 February 2014)
  → AVEPRO, Budgets 2015-2019
  → AVEPRO, Economic documents
  → AVEPRO, Annual reports 2014-2017

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

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[52] For example, the "Erasmus+ Today and Tomorrow" meeting at the Pontifical Gregorian University on March 26th, 2019 enabled the Agency to start a dialogue with the European Commission represented by Commissioner Navracsics.

9.6 ESG Standard 3.6: Internal Quality Assurance and professional conduct

STANDARD:
Agencies should have in place processes for internal Quality Assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Compliance by AVEPRO

Working for the Holy See is at the same time a privilege and a responsibility: all those who serve for the Apostolic See are expected to be and feel part of a "community".[53] In this respect not only must all the employees of the Holy See comply with and adopt the General Regulations of the Roman Curia, but they also have the substantial obligation to abide by a conduct of work and ethical life adequate to their responsibilities.

Hence, AVEPRO has been investing a lot of resources and energy over the twelve years since its foundation to build a good reputation and to be *accountable* to its stakeholders, the ecclesial community, the international community and society in general.

To this end, the Agency has been implementing an internal QA policy based on the following "pillars":

1. regular monitoring of in-progress and planned activities, coupled with a critical outlook aimed at redefining processes, procedures and relationships;
2. specific processes of inclusion, involvement and exchange with its stakeholders who are asked to offer feedback that stimulates and inspires the Agency in a path of continuous improvement;
3. preparation of the self-assessment report, according to the regulatory framework governing the Agency's relations with international Institutions or associations (art 12 §3 AVEPRO Statute);
4. support to the staff's continuous professional development as a key component of the Agency's competence and reliability.

The first "pillar" is based on a *sound internal management structure*. The Agency staff is also engaged in the critical overview of the performed activities. For instance, a meeting is held weekly at the Agency's premises, usually on Tuesdays. The President and the Director define the agenda using a template, and all the staff members can add questions/proposals/requests to it. Moreover, according to each agenda, additional materials can be presented and shared allowing all the Agency's members to be updated on every topic ongoing.

These "Tuesday meetings" produced several positive effects, starting from a faster and more efficient communication within the group that translated in a better coordination of the Agency's work. They also implemented the Agency's internal strategic planning and allowed a better monitoring of the stakeholders' involvement, due to the "real time" following of each developing situation.

From a more general point of view, the meetings concretely influence the optimization of work and help each member of the staff reach their objectives since they make it possible to implement an in-depth analysis of the Agency's activities, its organisational model, and the internal processes.

From a more specific point of view, these meetings are also opportunities for the staff to make proposals for their professional development, concerning ad hoc training programmes and/or national and international events, such as workshops and conferences.

The second "pillar" is based on the *collection and exchange of stakeholders' feedbacks*. According to its Statute, AVEPRO regularly forwards a concise report of its activities to the Secretariat of State (in charge of the Holy See's international relations) and to the CCE (the Holy See's minister for education). This happens on a yearly basis, by March 31st every year. These Institutions return their feedbacks in the form of suggestions, annotations and informal comments, by virtue of the synergies and collaborative processes existing among the Holy See's Institutions.

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[53] Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, November 20th 1982. See Adnexum II Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus*: "The collaborators of the Apostolic See as members of a professional community", articles 33-36.

With the CCE in particular, the Agency has been consolidating a collaborative and trustworthy practice. In this respect, the CCE's Bureau for University and the Department for International Organisations have been contributing to meetings held with AVEPRO every second month. Those meetings with the CCE are important also in terms of keeping AVEPRO updated in the development and changes currently taking place inside the Higher Education Systems.

Furthermore, the current President of AVEPRO and his predecessor have been both appointed to the CCE's Commission for the implementation of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium.* AVEPRO's President is also invited to present the Agency's activities at the Plenary Assembly of the CCE, which represents its highest governing body.

Feedbacks are sought and collected also from many other Institutions, such as the Episcopal Conferences, the Students Association of the Roman Pontifical Universities (SUPR), the expert members of the Evaluation Commissions. The Agency's governing bodies are also strongly contributing to its strategic orientations and to the monitoring of its activities. In particular the Board of Directors "assists the President in managing the Agency; approves the Agency's general approaches; supervises the Agency's activities, verifying the results".[54]

Also, regular meetings of the Board of Directors, involving students' representatives and members from non-European Countries, too, have allowed to collect suggestions and reasoned opinions about the Agency's operations and vision.

The participation of AVEPRO's staff members in international Conferences (in Europe and in other world areas) also allows the Agency to have a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and trends that Quality Assurance poses to Higher Education.

The third "pillar" of AVEPRO's internal QA policy is directly related to Article 12 of its Statute and to the obligation to go through *periodic self-evaluation processes*. Despite its universal vocation and scope, to date the Agency has opted to implement the ENQA-coordinated review process and to verify its compliance with the ESG 2015. To do so, the templates provided by ENQA are adopted. Further details are provided in Section 9.7.

The fourth "pillar" is focussing on the Agency's *human factor*, assuming that only well-trained and competent staff and managers can contribute to the internal quality. The Agency is going to implement a policy for personalised training based on three principles:

1. *Responsibility* → each staff member can define which learning objective is most relevant for him/herself and make a proposal for a personalised training programme.
2. *Self-training* → each staff member can choose the training delivery methods (e.g. e-learning, workshops, further education and Higher Education courses, etc.).
3. *Support to human resources development* → the Agency allows each staff member to use part of his/her working time for training and continuous professional development.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.6

► The award of the ENQA full membership in 2014 encouraged AVEPRO to define an internal QA policy geared to continuous improvement.
► As a consequence, the Agency has been implementing a mechanism of analysis and review applied to most of its internal processes, among which also those related to the self-assessment of Academic Institutions and to external evaluation, as well.
► The Agency strongly supports measures to improve its staff's professional conduct and development. This has implied, on the one hand, that the staff members are responsible for their professional growth

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[54] AVEPRO Statute, art. 8 §2.

> (defining learning objectives and training programmes) and, on the other hand, that the Agency allows that part of the staff's worked hours can be devoted to training.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ AVEPRO, Briefings and Agendas 2018-2019

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

→ General Rules of the Roman Curia/Regolamento generale della Curia Romana (30 April 1999)

→ Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to HE Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, November 20ᵗʰ 1982/Lettera di Giovanni Paolo II al Cardinale Segretario di Stato Agostino Casaroli

→ AVEPRO, Annual reports 2014-2019

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

9.7 ESG Standard 3.7: Cyclical external review of the Agency

STANDARD:
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Compliance by AVEPRO

According to Art. 12 of its Statute, every five years AVEPRO carries out a self-evaluation report. Efforts have been made to ensure that AVEPRO's self-evaluation process is very inclusive, involving all the Agency's staff, members of the Scientific Council and Board of Directors, and different stakeholders. As final output of this process, the Agency delivers a self-evaluation report, in compliance with the requirements established by the international associations (e.g. INQAAHE) it refers to. The self-evaluation report is published on the Agency's website.

In order to achieve ENQA full membership in 2014, AVEPRO has adopted the ESG as criteria guiding its practices for continuous improvement and enhancement of its QA processes and procedures. This also implies that AVEPRO has to undergo regularly an external evaluation against international standards. So far it has been evaluated by ENQA in 2014.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 3.7

► Art. 12 of AVEPRO's Statute determines the periodical review of the Agency's QA processes and procedures. Carried out every five years, this corresponds to the review process connected to the ENQA review process.

► AVEPRO is committed to renewing its membership to ENQA, as a *sine qua non* for the soundness and "quality" of its QA system, and as a unique platform for improving the quality culture by liaising with other Agencies across Europe.

► Since 2013, when the Agency applied for ENQA membership, remarkable progress has been made. Not only has the Agency clearly considered in its Statute the periodic review, but is has also implemented operational solutions in a continuous improvement perspective: set-up of the internal QA system; the increasing involvement of stakeholders as "expert partners" whose contribution (in terms of suggestions and opinions) can greatly support a more comprehensive and mature QA approach.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

→ AVEPRO, Annual reports 2014-2019

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines – ESG 2015 (Part 2)

10.1 ESG Standard 2.1: Consideration of internal Quality Assurance

STANDARD:

External Quality Assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal Quality Assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Compliance by AVEPRO

AVEPRO has developed the complete set of Guidelines for internal Quality Assurance, thus providing the ecclesiastical academic Institutions in Europe and beyond with a practical and unitarian framework for internal QA. Paralleling the evolution in the ESG, leading to the 2015 version, the Agency has been adapting its guidelines and toolsets embedding the culture of *accountability*, which has replaced the approach based on mere control.

The system proposed by AVEPRO foresees a coherent quality policy assuming that Institutions are responsible for the development of their internal quality: with the active contribution of students and other internal stakeholders, Institutions must check and evaluate all their activities, including study programmes, the organisation and volume of research, innovation, management, funding systems and services. Their procedures must promote academic and organisational quality, develop a culture of quality, reduce bureaucracy, have a good cost-effectiveness ratio, and avoid excessive rule-making. Consequently, external evaluation procedures should therefore ascertain, via site visits, that internal quality evaluation processes have been correct and effective.

Institutions are required to begin the process of self-evaluation which represents an opportunity to promote a culture of continuous monitoring of their own quality. In line with the proposals of the ESG 2015, AVEPRO's Guidelines present an approach that is expected to be part of a precise "management strategy" that is formalised and made public (see ESG 2015, 1.1), also ensuring the involvement of stakeholders (i.e. all those involved inside the Institution, including staff and students, as well as all those involved externally).

Ecclesiastical academic Institutions, with AVEPRO's guidance and advice, implement policies for internal Quality Assurance that take into consideration specific fundamental aspects:

→ the design and approval of study programmes (according to ESG 2015, 1.2);

→ the centrality of students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment (according to ESG 2015, 1.3);

→ control of all phases of students' experience: admission, progression, recognition and certification (according to ESG 2015, 1.4);

→ modes of recruitment, professional development and appraisal for teaching staff (according to ESG 2015, 1.5);

→ monitoring of didactic resources and support for students (according to ESG 2015, 1.6);

→ information management (according to ESG 2015, 1.7);

→ the publication of information (according to ESG 2015, 1.8);

→ ongoing monitoring and periodical review of programmes (according to ESG 2015, 1.9);

→ cyclical external Quality Assurance (according to ESG 2015, 1.10).

The approach to self-evaluation must be flexible, relatively easy to put into practice and clearly improvement-oriented.

The self-evaluation report collects objective information (e.g. the statistical data contained in the annexes) and personal/subjective views expressed by the key internal stakeholders (e.g. teaching staff, administrative and support staff, students). By stimulating reflection, participation, analysis and self-appraisal, it ensures the comprehensive coverage of the items contained in the SER's template, specifically focussing on the Institution's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (as presented in a concise form in the SWOT Analysis).

The SER is not intended for publication. It is a filed document for the exclusive use of the Institution itself, and the External Evaluation Commission and AVEPRO. In this respect, Institutions are encouraged to be open and transparent in dealing with their own structures, provisions and processes (which can sometimes be difficult). Furthermore, all involved actors need to bear in mind that "*The University or Faculty is community*" *and "all the people [in it] ... are ... co-responsible for the common good*" (*Veritatis gaudium*, art. 11), as well as for the cohesion of the academic community.

In line with consolidated international good practices, following self-evaluation AVEPRO will organise an external evaluation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions to verify the efficacy of their internal quality systems. The procedures employed for external evaluation are proportional to the size of the Institutions involved and reflect those used in the internal evaluation. The external evaluation report will show the fundamental importance of institutional quality promotion policies and make recommendations for improvements. The Report includes remarks upon the validity and precision of the SER, verifies any proposals for the Institution's development and provides recommendations for further actions.

Following this stage, the Institution prepares a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) based on the external evaluation report, and AVEPRO monitors its progress in implementing the Plan.

Furthermore, the Institution draws up a Strategic Plan (SP) based on the Guidelines proposed by AVEPRO. The Institution constantly monitors the implementation of its Strategic Plan.

The quality evaluation process is started again after five years, so to ensure periodic review and the actual adoption of a culture promoting self-enhancement and accountability.

The following table provides for a concise overview of the references to the ESG 2015 and the consistent Sections of the AVEPRO's tools and forms for Institutions and the Evaluation Commissions:

ESG 2015		INSTITUTION		COMMISSION
Stan-dard	**Specific elements**	**AVEPRO GUIDELINES**	**Guidelines for SELF-EVALUATION**	**Specific TOOL: SER Analysis form**
1.1	Policy for QA	§ "Summary and value of the Process[55]" Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 2. Part 1 § 3.2 Part 2 § 4. Part 3 § 5. Part 3 § 6. Part 3 § 7. Part 3 § 8.	§ "Introduction" § "Contents of the SER" "3. Quality Assurance/QA policies" § "SER and external evaluation visit" § "SER and strategic planning" § "SER Model" § Annexes to the SER: • 1 - Faculty organigram	Introduction (b.- d.) 1 (e., h., i.) 2 (a.–g.) 3 (a.–e.)
1.2	The design and approval of study programmes	Part 1 § 2.	§ "Contents of the SER" "4. General overview regarding programs: education, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches" § "Contents of the SER" "5. Strategies and modes of learning and the centrality of students" § "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff"	4 (a.–h.) 7 (a.–k.)

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[55] Subparagraph inside the § "Presentation of the document within the context of the AVEPRO guidelines".

| ESG 2015 | | INSTITUTION | | COMMISSION |
Stan-dard	Specific elements	AVEPRO GUIDELINES	Guidelines for SELF-EVALUATION	Specific TOOL: SER Analysis form
			§ "Contents of the SER" "8. Research and scholarship, support for the creation of research centers" {VG}[56] § "Contents of the SER" "10. Contributions to the outside world/third mission activities" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" {VG}	
1.3	The centrality of students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment	Part 1 § 3.2 Part 1 § 3.3	"Preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report/SER" § "Consultation within the Institution" § "Contents of the SER" "5. Strategies and modes of learning and the centrality of students" § Annexes to the SER: • 5 - Numbers of students • 6 - Number of newly enrolled students • 7 - Number of graduate students • 8 - Mean number of years to graduation • 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal	3 (e.) 4 (e., h.) 5 (b., d., f., g., h., i.) 7 (b., d., e., g.) Annexes: 5-9
1.4	Control of all phases of students' experience: admission, progression, recognition and certification	Part 1 §2.	§ "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff" § Annexes to the SER: • 5 - Numbers of students • 6 - Number of newly enrolled students • 7 - Number of graduate students • 8 - Mean number of years to graduation • 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal	5 (a., b., c., g., i.) 7 (k.) Annexes: 5-9
1.5	Modes of recruitment, professional development and appraisal for teaching staff	--	§ "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff" § "Contents of the SER" "8. Research and scholarship, support for the creation of research centers" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "9. Ability to create networks" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" § Annexes to the SER: • 2 - Numbers of teaching staff • 3 - Mean age of teaching staff • 4 - Mean hours of teaching per week • 10 - Scientific production - Number of publications/contributions to conferences by teaching staff	7 (h., i., j.) 8 (a., d., g.-m.) 9 (c. - f.) Annexes: 2-4, 10 {VG}
1.6	Monitoring of didactic resources and support for students	Part 1 § 3.3	§ "Preparation of the instruments (meetings, questionnaires, focus groups...)" § "Contents of the SER" "6. Support and services for students" § "Contents of the SER" "6. Support and services for students" § "Contents of the SER" "13. Policies and modes of governance, and management of resources available (structures, staff, economic and financial resources)" § Annexes to the SER: • 11 - Economic/financial sources	4 (h.) 5 (a.) 6 (a.–e.) 8 (a.–c., e.–m.) Annexes: 11
1.7	Information management	Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 3. Part 1 § 3.3	§ "Preparation of the instruments (meetings, questionnaires, focus groups...)" § "Preparation of the SER" § "Contents of the SER" "2. SWOT Analysis and updating of the Strategic Plan"	3 (a.- g.) 5 (a.-b., e.–i.) 11 (a.–k.) 13 (h., j.) Annexes: 1-11

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[56] Those are specific issues from the *Veritatis gaudium* that also matches the ESG standard.

| ESG 2015 | | INSTITUTION | | COMMISSION |
Stan-dard	Specific elements	AVEPRO GUIDELINES	Guidelines for SELF-EVALUATION	Specific TOOL: SER Analysis form
			§ "Contents of the SER" "9. Ability to create networks" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" § Annexes to the SER: • 1 - Faculty organigram • 2 - Numbers of teaching staff • 3 - Mean age of teaching staff • 4 - Mean hours of teaching per week • 5 - Numbers of students • 6 - Number of newly enrolled students • 7 - Number of graduate students • 8 - Mean number of years to graduation • 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal • 10 - Scientific production - Number of publications/contributions to conferences by teaching staff • 11 - Economic/financial source	
1.8	The publication of information	Part 1 § 1.	§ "Contents of the SER" "12. Publicity and information management"	12 (a.–c.)
1.9	Ongoing monitoring and periodical review of programmes	Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 3.2	§ "Contents of the SER" "4. General overview regarding programs: education, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches" § "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff"	4 (a.–g.)
1.10	Cyclical external Quality Assurance	§ "Summary and value of the Process[57]" Part 3 § 8.	§ "Contents of the SER" "3. Quality Assurance/QA policies" § "SER and strategic planning"	3 (a., e.)

External quality evaluation does not end with the publication of the related Report but will prompt structured follow-up procedures with the aim of ensuring that the recommendations are given due consideration and that Strategic Plans are drawn up and effectively implemented. Thus, the promotion of quality will not be constituted of quasi-bureaucratic episodes of assessment, but will be oriented to each Institution's endeavours to achieve continuous improvement.

The accreditation of all ecclesiastical academic Institutions remains the competence of the CCE, as do any administrative decisions.

Further to the above, the process of evaluation and quality improvement answers four fundamental questions (as stated in the institutional evaluation programme of the EUA):

WHAT are we trying to do?
HOW are we trying to do it?
HOW do we know if it works?
HOW can we change for the better?

These questions prompt reflection upon the mission, purposes, objectives and strategic priorities, upon the systems and procedures in use and their fitness to achieve the mission, as well as what type of measures are usually implemented, including feedback from students, staff, employers and other stakeholders, not to mention the procedures for strategic planning, including the capacity to change and meet new challenges.

The experience gained in the last years by the Agency suggests that the process should be as inclusive and shared as possible, with the aim of stimulating a fruitful combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

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[57] Cfr. note 41.

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FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.1

► The commitment of ecclesiastical academic Institutions to embed the quality culture in their organisational structures and processes is the key step to ensure continuous improvement and accountability. In particular, since the first evaluation rounds, Institutions have progressed in terms of organisation chart and process reengineering, establishing internal departments for Quality Assurance and evaluation. Smaller Institutions, not having the capacity to set up specific bureaus, have reorganised their services with the support of AVEPRO's advisors.

► In the Guidelines for Self-Evaluation" and related templates, AVEPRO builds on the principle that Institutions are responsible for the development of their internal quality, and has explained the requirements for internal evaluation and the steps to carry it out.

► In the "Guidelines", AVEPRO has explained the overall Quality Assurance cycle, ensuring that all ecclesiastical academic Institutions are aware of the process and are able to carry out the tasks assigned to them.

► quality evaluation is a cyclical process which prompts structured follow-up procedures with the aim of ensuring that Institutions define and implement their Quality Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan.

► Through the promotion of quality culture, the Agency has created an innovative system of relations within the great part of ecclesiastical academic Institutions achieving a high degree of acceptance. It is now generally reputed as an expert partner for HEIs (point of Strength, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

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► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

→ AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)

→ AVEPRO, Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (Guidelines B)

→ AVEPRO, Self-Evaluation Report/SER FORM

→ AVEPRO, Self-Evaluation Report/SER analysis FORM

→ AVEPRO, Ecclesiastical higher education system in the global world Rationales of AVEPRO evaluation system (Guidelines E)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.2 ESG Standard 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose

STANDARD:
External Quality Assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Compliance by AVEPRO

In designing its Quality Assurance model, preliminarily it is to be recalled what is stated in the AVEPRO's Guidelines: "*the main aim of the Agency's Guidelines, similarly to those drawn up in 2009, is to ensure a common and unitary orientation for all ecclesiastical academic Institutions both in Europe and in other Continents, while maintaining a level of general applicability sufficient to respect the diversities and characteristics of the individual Institutions in their own specific contexts. Hence, they apply to the ecclesiastical University Institutions under the guidance of AVEPRO, which operates in an international dimension in line with the Universal vocation of the Church (art. 4 §1 AVEPRO Statute) and therefore in a not*

solely European but global context".[58]

AVEPRO adopts a single approach which brings together and harmonises different standpoints and interests:

➡ *The Apostolic constitution Veritatis gaudium (2017)*. Each ecclesiastical academic Institution should, through mission statements, strategic plans and other authoritative declarations, define its objectives and profiles as well as the means and policies through which they intend to realise them. Quality development and evaluation should relate to the objectives and stated aspirations of the Institution.

➡ *The ESG 2015*, being the key reference framework, which is guiding the entire process. The guidelines and templates prepared by AVEPRO follow the indications of the ESG, as do the self-evaluation and external evaluation processes to be enacted by ecclesiastical academic Institutions.

➡ *The Statutes of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions*, which are built on the individual "charism" (what identifies and characterises the specific mission of a religious Order) inspiring and steering the action of each institution, and which account for the country-specific legal bases and diverse cultural features.

The first step in quality evaluation is taken by ecclesiastical academic Institutions, when they decide to undertake the QA process. They adopt responsibly and autonomously the toolset (as previously indicated in §4.1: guidelines, tools and templates) prepared by AVEPRO with the involvement of the key stakeholders[59] and made available on the Agency's website. As in the Guidelines: "*In line with the ESG 2015, the system proposed by AVEPRO foresees a coherent quality policy [which is] based precisely on the conviction that Institutions are responsible for the development of their internal quality: with the active contribution of students, Institutions must control and evaluate all their activities, including study programmes, the organisation and volume of research, innovation, management, funding systems and service*".[60]

Institutional improvement and enhancement policies are recognised as fundamental elements in Quality Assurance. The Agency ensures a specific and continuing support to ecclesiastical academic Institutions committed to implement a QA-oriented change process. Not only does AVEPRO provide detailed information and guidelines to start the related QA processes, but it also grants the support of its experts (the staff working in Rome at the Agency's office, as well as regional experts who may find it easier to reach different locations). In this way punctual and adequate services are provided:

"*AVEPRO is aware of the complexity of the challenges it faces. The Agency needs to support the ecclesiastical Institutions to ensure that they achieve an appropriate position in the world of Higher Education via the development of an efficient and coherent process of quality promotion that is based on constant improvement, supports a culture of quality in all activities, and meets the international or regional standards and guidelines*".[61]

Although AVEPRO's external evaluation reports do not imply any formal consequences, yet they are crucial to the mandatory implementation of the HEIs quality culture, as implied by *Veritatis gaudium.* In this respect,

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[58] AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A), Introduction, "The new AVEPRO guidelines in the light of the innovations introduced by the ESG 2015".
[59] The key stakeholders, both internal (e.g. Faculties, students) and external (e.g. CCE, Episcopal Conferences) play an important role in the development of the Agency's toolset. They can bring different issues at the attention of the Agency. This happened for example in Spain where the Episcopal Conference invited the Agency for a training seminar for Deans on issues related to the QA processes before starting the evaluations. Another concrete example refers to the experience realised in 2015, after the evaluation of part of the Rome-based ecclesiastical academic Institutions. Faculties, Universities and Athenaeums, together with the Superiors of Religious Orders, posed a question about how they would "use" the results of the evaluation so to foster future strategic developments. As a consequence, the Agency, together with the interested parties delivered the guidelines for strategic planning which became an integral part of the evaluation activities.
[60] Ibid. § "Context and general principles of evaluation".
[61] Ibid. § "Context and general principles of evaluation".

a follow-up phase is realised within twelve months after the site visit: the Institution is asked to produce its Quality Improvement Plan (after 6 months) and its Strategic Plan (within 12 months). The follow-up phase is meant to:

- explain how the review findings and recommendations have been discussed and disseminated throughout the Institution's committee structure and academic units;
- comment on how effectively the University is addressing the review outcomes;
- identify the range of strategic and logistical developments and decisions that have occurred within the Institution since the publication of the review report, and should address each of the key findings and recommendations that the reviewers presented.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.2

► The AVEPRO's QA model is regularly updated and improved. Currently, it is built on the revised ESG 2015 and the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* (2017). The aim is to ensure compliance with existing regulatory frameworks whilst taking into account the specificities of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions as defined in their Statutes.

► The toolset that AVEPRO provides to the ecclesiastical academic Institutions are updated regularly with the support of key stakeholders (internal, e.g. Faculties, students; external, e.g. the CCE, the Episcopal Conferences) and are publicly available. All ecclesiastical academic Institutions can have access to them and use them in autonomy when preparing for the QA evaluation process.

► The cycle of quality evaluation for ecclesiastical academic Institutions is supported and strengthened by their acceptance of improvement and enhancement policies. AVEPRO decisions do not imply any formal consequences for the accreditation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions.

► AVEPRO grants specific importance to the *promotion of Quality Assurance* and to *continuous improvement.* The *culture of quality* becomes an asset that is shared among the different actors. The Agency also provides a sort of "cultural accompaniment", made of expert advice, feedback systems and support to monitor follow-up phases.

► The Agency thus pays great attention to the selection, training and continuous development of the experts it involves. The e-learning programme specifically designed for the members of the Evaluation Commissions is a remarkable tool designed to help strengthen their skills and expertise.

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)
→ AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)
→ AVEPRO, Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (Guidelines B)
→ AVEPRO, Guidelines for External Evaluation (Guidelines C)
→ AVEPRO website

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.3 ESG Standard 2.3: Implementing processes

STANDARD:
External Quality Assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, consistently implemented and published. They include
- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

Compliance by AVEPRO

The quality evaluation process should be considered a cyclic, common and continuous activity, within which the following phases can be distinguished (as already described in Chapter 5):

➡ Internal evaluation or self-evaluation (1.)

➡ External evaluation (2.)

➡ Definition of the Quality Improvement Plan (3.)

➡ Strategic planning (4.)

The starting point of the process is the Internal Evaluation (Self-Evaluation) of quality, which gives the Institutions the opportunity to conduct a critical self-evaluation and appraisal of the implementation of its strategic plan and the work done by its various components, and to learn about the viewpoints of students and other users of the services they provide.

The work consists of the preparation of a Self-Evaluation Report/SER containing both perceptions, such as the opinions of those who work and study at the Institution regarding its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT Analysis), and objective information (the statistical data contained in the annexes). The emphasis is on reflection, participation, and analysis.

In line with consolidated international good practice and the provisions of the ESG, following self-evaluation AVEPRO organises an external evaluation of the ecclesiastical Institution to verify the efficacy of its internal quality systems. The procedures employed for external evaluation will be proportional to the size of the Institution involved and reflect those used in the internal evaluation.

In short, as described in the AVEPRO's Guidelines:

→ The Institution prepares a Self-Evaluation Report/SER using a method agreed upon with AVEPRO.

→ AVEPRO appoints a group of international experts (Evaluation Commission) to analyse the SER, visit the Institution (site visit) and write a Report, which will be fully published (external evaluation report).

→ The external evaluation report will show the fundamental importance of institutional quality promotion policies and make recommendations for improvements. The Report includes remarks upon the validity and precision of the SER, verifies any proposals for the Institution's development and provides recommendations for further actions.

→ The site visit report is published on the web site including possible addenda and or comments made by the Institution and sent to the main stakeholders (Chancellors, Rectors, Deans, the CCE, etc.).

→ The Institution prepares a Quality Improvement Plan/QIP based on the external evaluation report, and AVEPRO will support the Institution in the phase of monitor and implementation of the Plan.

→ The Institution draws up a Strategic Plan based on the guidelines proposed by AVEPRO.

→ The Strategic Plan must be monitored on a regular basis by the Institution itself, while its implementation effectively launches the subsequent cycle of evaluation.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.3

► The process of external QA is fully transparent.

► It involves many actors and partners and it contributes (as part of the whole process) to the development of a quality culture in the ecclesiastical academic Institutions.

► Quality evaluation is a cyclical process which prompts structured follow-up procedures with the aim of ensuring Institutions define and implement their Quality Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan.

► Through this process the level of accountability of ecclesiastical academic Institutions increases.

► The Agency's guidelines offer a clear evaluation path (Why - How - What). The fifth document of the guidelines briefly describes the rationale of the evaluation path which ultimately should generate positive effects not only on the Holy See's Higher Education System but also on the broader context.

► Relating quality to strategic planning has made it explicit for HEIs that quality is a continuous process.

> The Agency pursues objectives of transparency and disclosure, publishing all relevant documentation and results of its activity (point of Strength, SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13).

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ AVEPRO, Guidelines (all 5 documents)
→ AVEPRO website

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.4 ESG Standard 2.4: Peer-review experts

STANDARD:
External Quality Assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

Compliance by AVEPRO

AVEPRO has carried out external evaluation visits in 9 European countries involving, in every case, international experts and student representatives as part of the External Evaluation Commissions. To achieve this goal, the Agency has set up a database of approximately 350 experts, as described in § 6.3 (and defined in the AVEPRO's Guidelines).
As already stated, to be part of the database would-be external experts can either send in an unsolicited application or be indicated by the Board of Directors and/or the Scientific Council, or be indicated by a Higher Education Institution or QA body. Each *curriculum vitae et studiorum* is analysed and the candidate's profile is entered into the database.

It is important to underline that the experts in the External Evaluation Commissions are not paid by AVEPRO, and take part in the evaluation process in light of the values of the Church itself.

The Agency acknowledges experts' technical skills (for example teaching subjects, management experiences within Higher Education Institutions) as well as their language skills. Multilingualism is in fact one of the most significant challenges that the Agency has been facing since its inception. Evaluation Commissions are necessarily composed of experts from different countries who need to read and communicate using a common working language, though respecting and valuing the languages spoken in the involved countries.
To date, the experts in the Agency's database come from over 20 countries, covering approximately 10 languages. Their professional expertise and academic specialty vary, although Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law are their main subject areas (consistently with the features of the Holy See's Higher Education system). Many of them, usually those who are appointed as presidents of the Evaluation Commissions, have had managerial responsibilities (as Rectors, Deans, or Under-Secretaries or Ministers in national Governments).

The experts for external evaluation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions are appointed for a five-year term by the President of the Agency, after consultation with the CCE which, having more information regarding the careers of teachers, can, for example, immediately report any possibility of conflicts of interest.

As previously mentioned, since the Holy See's Higher Education system has Faculties in the five continents, the involved external experts come from all over the world. Moreover, the criteria the Agency follows in setting up Commissions for external evaluations are the following:
- at least one expert should have considerable knowledge in Quality Assurance;
- at least one expert should have considerable scientific knowledge in the main field of the Faculty;
- at least one expert should be a student representative;
- at least one expert should not be living in the country in which the evaluation will take place.

The Evaluation Commissions are composed by the Agency, after a process of cross-checks that foresees:

→ a careful analysis of the situation of the Institution (e.g. number of ecclesiastical academic Faculties in the area, peculiar local legal frameworks, charisma of the Order that is responsible for the Institution - that is Jesuits, Salesians, Dominicans, Franciscans etc -, linguistic requirements);

→ consultation of the expert database (or research for new experts if required);

→ verification of potential conflict of interest on the basis of the available CV and the information provided by the CCE;

→ definition of a "long list" of possible candidates for the site visit;

→ contacts with the experts aimed at verifying the absence of conflict of interest and their availability for being appointed for the site visit;

→ appointment of the expert for a five years period (if not yet appointed, that is in the case of the first experience as member of an AVEPRO's evaluation commission);

→ decision made by the President and appointment of the Evaluation Commission.

The AVEPRO experts are selected in accordance with the Statute (article 11) that provides the general criteria. Each commission is fully appointed if there is at least a student representative. She/he is selected from a list of students (many of them engaged in a third cycle programme). This list is composed of applications presented by Institutions, stakeholders or on a voluntary basis by the students themselves.

The Agency, where possible and appropriate, tends to appoint students who live in the same area where the academic Institution operates. This method allows to Evaluation Commission to have a student representative which is fully aware of the main problematics and situations of the area and, at the same time, helps the Institutions containing the costs of the evaluation[62].

It has to be underlined that the conflict of interest policy of the Agency is based on:

➤ trust

➤ experts' and Institutions' sense of responsibility

➤ gratuity (as presented in §9.5)

➤ on cross-checks of provided information.

Adopting this policy AVEPRO's intention is to foster a culture of quality that embraces a true spirit of shared values and a deep ethical approach.

Experts can rely on the Agency for advice, support and clarifications, as well as for specific training based on three main instruments: (a) *ad hoc* seminars, (b) AVEPRO's Guidelines, and (c) e-learning training programme for external evaluators. The combination of these three provisions offers a wide spectrum of tools and helps the Agency cover one of its most strategic activities.

The Agency is currently considering whether and how to enhance the training path for experts through a blended learning course implemented through the Moodle platform.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.4

▶ The members of the Evaluation Commissions have diverse and complementary skills and expertise profiles, covering subject matters such as QA, teaching, research, management of Higher Education Institutions.

▶ Particular care is exercised in the selection of experts. They are appointed for a five-year term by the President of the Agency, based on the strength of their scientific competence as well as academic and

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[62] It is worth reminding here that AVEPRO does not charge any fee for the evaluation of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions and all the costs for the external evaluation are covered by the Institution itself.

ecclesial experience. The names of experts are entered into a list from which they are selected for single evaluations. This list must be composed of a number of persons sufficient to carry out all planned evaluations in a reasonable period of time and in the main languages.

► In every Evaluation Commission it is granted the participation of one student representative and one "international" member.

► The training of experts represents one of the major challenges for the Agency both for language issues and for operational needs (for example, knowledge of both the Higher Education System of the Holy See and that of the country where the Academic Institution is located) (Point of Weakness. SWOT Analysis, see Chapter 13)

► A project is under way aimed at revising and enriching the training provisions for experts through a blended learning course.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ AVEPRO, Experts database

→ AVEPRO, Guidelines for External Evaluation (Guidelines C)

→ AVEPRO website

→ AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.5 ESG Standard 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

STANDARD:
Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external Quality Assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

Compliance by AVEPRO

The AVEPRO guidelines represent the essential *vade mecum* to which all ecclesiastical academic Institutions and all the members of External Evaluation Commissions need to refer in order to understand the Quality Assurance culture that the Agency promotes and supports, and the related organisational aspects that undergo specific evaluation. In implementing this approach, AVEPRO considers all the members of the academic community as to be informed, supported and accompanied.

The complete set of Guidelines and other tools are published on the Agency's website: they are accessible not only by interested parties (academic Institutions and experts), but to the broad public, as evidence of the Agency's quality approach to transparency and full disclosure.

In order to ensure the common understanding of how to use the guidelines and the criteria contained therein, the Agency has been implementing a set of information and training measures targeting, on the one hand, the staff of ecclesiastical academic Institutions and, on the other hand, the experts who are part of the External Evaluation Commissions. For instance, in 2016-2017 a series of meetings were held in Spain to inform and train academic Institutions' representatives (e.g. Deans and directors for quality). The following year, the same measures were started in Poland.

The AVEPRO evaluation process does not lead to formal decisions (e.g. accreditation). The Commission's recommendations are communicated to the Academic Institution which takes them into account in drawing up its own QIP and then its SP. The Reports of the External Evaluation Commissions are also sent to the CCE, which will take them into account when taking the decision about accreditation.

The Agency publishes the external evaluation report on its website and also offers guidelines for the preparation of the Strategic Plan. This phase concludes an evaluation cycle and starts the next one. This

cyclical, transparent and predefined process is considered a way to practically implement the promotion of a shared quality culture.

Even if the outcome of the site visit could be perceived as a light one, the *impact* of the evaluation procedure is extremely relevant. An Institution can "fail" a review when it becomes clear to the Commission that the information provided in the self-evaluation report is distant from reality, or if the Institution's means or choices are in contrast with the mission it should fulfil. Moreover, the way in which the recommendations are indicated follows usually a developmental approach suggesting options aimed at sustaining quality. Nevertheless, the Gran Chancellor and the CCE (the authorities which have the responsibility on the academic Institution from a Canonical point of view and that receive the report from the Agency), have the opportunity to interpret the recommendations and to consider, together with the evaluated Institution, concrete possibilities to implement them. The Agency is well aware of its "soft power" and the whole ecclesiastical Higher Education System acknowledges the importance of it. So, even if the scheme is not based on a "stick and carrot" dynamic, the whole process is fully transparent, inclusive, quality-enhancement oriented and based on the principle that the Academic Faculties and Universities should be considered as mature and responsible Institutions. Therefore, an evaluation process based on these assumptions becomes the first step of a policy of quality promotion. The paradigm of this approach foresees that all the actors involved share a common goal that is a spirit of service for the humanity.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.5

► The most important outcome that the Agency intends to achieve at the end of an evaluation cycle is the development of the culture of quality by sharing methods, processes and procedures with the academic Institutions.

► The Agency is committed to ensure transparency of QA processes and procedures, and to provide members of the ecclesiastical academic community with the information and training they may need to implement the QA cycle effectively. To this end, methodological documents, guidelines, tools, past evaluation reports of ecclesiastical academic Institutions are published in the Agency's website.

► The promotion of a common understanding of the Holy See's Quality Assurance approach is a key priority for AVEPRO. It organises regular information and training events for ecclesiastical academic Institutions, so to allow their full comprehension of the approach, tools and guidelines.

► The most relevant outcome of the evaluation procedure is to generate an impact on all the relevant stakeholders involved in the process. The sum of these impacts supports a paradigm shift from the centrality of the academic Institution to the centrality of the relationship with the society inspired by a spirit of service.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ AVEPRO, Vincenzo Buonomo, "The Holy See in the contemporary international relation. A juridical approach following the international law and praxis" in "*CIVITAS ET IUSTITIA*" -Review of the Faculty of Law of the Pontifical Lateran University, II (2004), pp. 7-40

→ AVEPRO, Evaluation of the HE Ecclesiastical Institutions located in Rome (2015)

→ AVEPRO, Summary of evaluation activities conducted at the Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions present in Spain 2016-2018

→ AVEPRO website

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.6 ESG Standard 2.6: Reporting

STANDARD:
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Compliance by AVEPRO

The external evaluation report is the most visible result of the whole evaluation process, as it is fully published on the AVEPRO website. This report recognises the importance of institutional enhancement policies as a fundamental element in Quality Assurance, and contains recommendations for improvement. The Evaluation Commission is required to write the report in a clear and easy-to-read style, since it has also a dissemination purpose addressing the public of non-experts, too.

In its Guidelines for external evaluation, AVEPRO quotes both some insights deriving from the experience realised in the frame of EQArep Project[63] and the standard 2.6 of the ESG 2015. In particular the Agency identifies and suggests to the Evaluation Commissions certain elements that must be included - concisely - in the external evaluation report.

In order to facilitate the task of the Evaluation Commissions, AVEPRO sends to them a "format" of the final report to be used when writing up the Report.
According to the procedure, the President of the Commission sends the final draft of the Report to the Institution, which has two weeks' time in which to respond; if no response is provided within this time, the Institution is considered to have given its tacit consent.
If the Institution integrates the report with corrections of clerical errors or specific statements on factual issues, this integration will merge with the site visit report and be part of the final report that will be published.

After these steps, and usually within 10 weeks after completion of the visit, AVEPRO renders the Report public via:
- publication on AVEPRO's website;
- delivery to the CCE, the Grand Chancellor and any other academic authorities (Dean, Head, Rector).

Since the Holy See has seven official languages, AVEPRO tends to accept final reports if written in one of them; nevertheless, the Agency requires English and/or Italian to be used whenever possible.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.6

► Transparency of the evaluation processes and outcomes is a key priority in external Quality Assurance. AVEPRO publishes on its web site and makes available to experts as well as to the broad public the guidelines and the Reports that the external Evaluation Commissions develop.
► The Agency's key stakeholders in this phase – namely the CCE and the Academic Institutions' governing bodies (where students' representatives sit) – are immediately involved: AVEPRO shares with them the external evaluation report according to a formal schedule.
► AVEPRO takes the issue of multilingualism very seriously: it requires English and/or Italian to be used whenever possible, being the two languages used worldwide by the ecclesiastical academic community.

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[63] ENQA, EQArep/Transparency of European Higher Education Through Public Quality Assurance Reports - Final report of the project, 2014, p. 51

► MAIN EVIDENCES

    → AVEPRO website

    → AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)

    → AVEPRO, Guidelines for External Evaluation (Guidelines C)

    → AVEPRO, Evaluation report TEMPLATE

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

10.7 ESG Standard 2.7: Complaints and appeals

STANDARD:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external Quality Assurance processes and communicated to the Institutions.

Compliance by AVEPRO

AVEPRO processes, criteria and procedures are pre-defined and available on the Agency's website. The methodologies designed by the Agency are aligned with the purpose and objectives of the reviews, while also serving as professional orientation for those who participate in internal and external review processes. This leads to outcomes that are the result of a consistent method of work. Moreover, the aim of the procedure is to foster dialogue and interaction between the Agency and the Institution, according to the common aim of the ongoing enhancement of quality in the Holy See's Higher Education system. Even if the results of the institutional evaluation do not produce any formal consequences, the Agency's review processes provide for an appeals procedure.

As stated in the Guidelines on external evaluation (namely "Procedure for review of the Evaluation Report and appeals"):

"*Should the Institution find what it deems are serious and grounded reasons for a revision of the Report, it can appeal directly to AVEPRO. The Institution must send a formal request for the publication of the Report to be postponed, stating the reason for its appeal in detail. Once AVEPRO has received such formal request, it postpones publication of the Report and submits the question to the Agency's Scientific Council, which has two options:*

- *it can accept the appeal and suggest possible solutions to resolve the issue (e.g. the appointment of a new Evaluation Commission, or the rewriting of all or part of the Report);*
- *it can reject the appeal if it deems that the objections made were unfounded/groundless*".

The Agency has so far carried out 128 evaluations and there have been no situations of conflict to end up in appeal.

FOCAL POINTS FOR ESG STANDARD 2.7

► As stated in the previous Standard 2.6, transparency of the evaluation processes and outcomes is a key priority in external Quality Assurance. To this end, AVEPRO processes, criteria and procedures are pre-defined and available on the Agency's website.

► The evaluation process carried out by AVEPRO is aimed at promoting a quality culture through the connection between Quality Assurance and Strategic Planning. The recommendations contained in the external evaluation report are the most relevant element suggested to the ecclesiastical academic Institution. It is up to the Institution to accept the recommendations and develop the necessary steps to implement them. Taking into consideration this feature of the process, the Guidelines also foresee an appeal procedure to be started upon "*serious and grounded reasons*".

► The appeal is handled by the Agency's Scientific Council, whose standing and know-how are elements of independence, transparency and competence.

► MAIN EVIDENCES

    → AVEPRO, Guidelines for External Evaluation (Guidelines C)

    → AVEPRO, Guidelines on Strategic Planning (Guidelines D)

    → AVEPRO website

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

11. Information and opinions about Stakeholders

AVEPRO, in carrying out its activities, involves and hears many stakeholders, at national and international level, pursuing different goals and mobilising a variety of resources. Stakeholders have been mapped and clustered on the basis of their main contribution to AVEPRO's operations. This does not exclude that the same organisations can contribute, albeit to a lesser extent, also to other activities of the Agency. Although the currently involved stakeholders provide for valuable inputs and ensure a broad acceptance of the Agency's activities, their contribution could be increased. For instance, AVEPRO is willing to explore to possibility to further involve existing non-national and transversal networks (e.g. the religious Orders). This would be a great opportunity to consolidate its activity in many countries.

The stakeholders' level of engagement and contribution to AVEPRO's activities, testify of their concrete positive feedbacks with respect to the Agency's work.

A. Strategic purposes

The stakeholders contribute with regulatory and legal frameworks, institutional visions for development, "roadmaps" for operations and further development; resources assignments, etc.

    ➡ Board of Directors and Scientific Council of the Agency

    ➡ Academic Institutions

For example, in January 2019 the Agency carried out a Europe-wide survey, asking also about fields and areas where the Agency should offer more information and advice. The managing representatives of European Academic Institutions asked for specific support, such as: more information related to the recognition of qualifications and the diploma supplement. Furthermore, a better comprehension of the implications of the *Veritatis gaudium* on the Holy See's academic system is a cross-cutting theme. The response rate was really meaningful: 67% of involved Faculties replied in the given timeframe (in some areas the response rate was close to 100%, such as in Spain and in Rome).

B. Consultative purposes

The stakeholders contribute with guidelines, good practices, discussion fora (e.g. colloquies and conferences), methodological innovations to the advancement of AVEPRO's QA approach (methods, tools, organisation):

    ➡ CCE

    ➡ Secretary of State

    ➡ Apostolic Nunciatures

    ➡ Secretary of Economy and Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA)

    ➡ Other QA Agencies

    ➡ National/International organisations active in the field of the QA (not exhaustive list):

        - ENQA, FIUC, EUA, INQAAHE

➡ Conferences of Rectors:

 - CRUIPRO (for Rome-based Pontifical Universities); other Conferences in Europe and other Countries

➡ Students (involved also in the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council of the Agency for Strategic purposes).

As an example, in 2019 - in view of the launch of the 2nd evaluation cycle in France - AVEPRO started with UDESCA (Union of Catholic Establishments of Higher Education) a joint work aimed at identifying possible methodologies and modalities to combine the requirements of AVEPRO's evaluation and those deriving from the French regulatory framework for Higher Education.

C. Advisory purposes

The stakeholders provide inputs and feedback on specific issues concerning QA, such as organisation of evaluation cycle, updating/revision of Guidelines and templates; scheduling of evaluation cycles; drafting of Strategic plans and Quality Improvement Plans; organisation of periodic surveys, etc.

➡ Episcopal Conferences

➡ the academic community: teachers; students; staff of service units; councils

➡ external advisors with expertise on specific academic and QA matters.

The synergy established with the Spanish Episcopal Conference is a key result. The collaboration was created to organise and carry out the institutional evaluation of Spanish ecclesiastical academic Institutions. This experience strongly contributed in defining the characteristics of the so-called "model by nation" approach.

Annex 3 provides for a visual map of AVEPRO's stakeholders and a concise description of their role.

▶ MAIN EVIDENCES
  → AVEPRO, Annual report 2014-2019
  → AVEPRO, Briefings and Agendas 2018-2019

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

12. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and Agency's resulting follow-up

The first site visit of the ENQA Panel in 2013 opened a process of reflection and redefinition of the strategies and objectives of AVEPRO. The Report which will follow the second site visit will offer highlights on the consolidation of what achieved in the last years. This source of information, data and analysis will be systematized with the SWOT in order to define the generation of future objectives, priorities and actions of the Agency.

The legacy of the first site visit allowed the Agency to address the issues/challenges that the Panel highlighted in its recommendations, adapting them where possible to the innovations introduced by the ESG 2015. In particular:

➢ **(Former) ESG 2.1 – Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures**

AVEPRO should revisit its review methodology to more fully encompass expectations for internal Quality Assurance arrangements within all types of Higher Education Institutions as laid down in ESG part I.

As indicated in the follow-up report sent to the ENQA Board in 2016, AVEPRO has included in its strategic planning a specific task aimed at redefining its guidelines for internal and external evaluation. In achieving

this goal, the Agency has tried to re-orient the entire process by taking into consideration different sources such as:

- The ESG 2015, which strengthen the paradigm shift from a system of "control" to a system of "accountability" and hence the promotion of quality.

- The new Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, which renews the legislation in force for ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

- The feedback received on the evaluation by academic Institutions, which often underline that follow-up processes need to be supported with specific advice for management, governance and strategic planning.

- The "universal" logic or the possibility of making the Agency guidelines applicable not only in the European context but also in other parts of the world.

- "Flexibility" has been considered as a pivotal element since ecclesiastical academic Institutions are often subject to the respect of the norms of the Holy See and those of the State or Region in which they operate.

To achieve these objectives, AVEPRO has made it explicit in the new guidelines the connection between Part 1 of the ESG and the entire proposed self-assessment model, extending it, where necessary, with methodological inputs taken from the IEP of the EUA or from international best practices (like those indicated by INQAAHE).

The new model therefore considers the ecclesiastical academic Institutions as mature and solid Institutions, thus making concrete what is established in the first principle of the ESG 2015, that is the primary responsibility for the process of Quality Assurance lies with the individual Institutions.

➤ **ESG 2.4 – Processes Fit for Purpose**

The Panel welcomes the participation of student members within the teams but encourages AVEPRO for greater effort to bring cohesion to the involvement of students in the processes of the Agency and in Quality Assurance matters on the ground within the ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

AVEPRO has been promoting the "centrality of the student" notion, by acting in various directions.
A very significant relationship has been established with the Association of students enrolled at the Pontifical Roman Universities/SUPR (to date the only student association in the frame of the Holy See's academic system). One member of the Association has been appointed to the Agency's Scientific Council. Furthermore, in all Evaluation Commissions the presence of a student is ensured.

Keeping in mind that ecclesiastical academic Institutions are spread all over the world and that it is difficult to define a "typical" student's profile, there are some recurrent features that help understand the current level of students' engagement. For example, most students are adult (in their 30s), belong to religious orders (priests or seminarians) and only a minor part is made of lay people.
Especially in the Rome-based Pontifical Universities, the presence of foreign students is very high. Many of them come from developing countries and are aware of the costs that their Dioceses of origin or their religious orders are supporting for their formation. In addition to that, students generally carry out pastoral work at the same time and therefore bear a very significant workload.
For these reasons, it is clear that the involvement of students can pass through schemes and logics that are decidedly different from those used by lay universities.

The Agency is aware that it is necessary to invest more resources to stimulate the academic Institutions to support students' leadership, with expected positive outcomes in terms of academic, professional and personal growth.

➤ **ESG 2.5 – Reporting**

AVEPRO should reinforce requirements towards different review panels so that they fully follow the Agency's guidance in all aspects of external reviews, in particular adhering to the single standard report form developed. The Agency may also be willing to learn from ENQA EQArep project on best practice in publishing reports and to adjust its performance accordingly.

The academic Institutions that refer to AVEPRO are located in 20 European countries and in many cases are subject to more QA regimes. The Agency, in redefining its guidelines, has taken into consideration this specificity of the Holy See's Higher Education System, also valuing the conclusions of the EQArep project, when it stated that it was not possible to achieve the definition of "*a single European template for comprehensive reports*" (ENQA Occasional papers 21, page 44).

This has also influenced the follow-up actions related to the ENQA Panel's recommendations. To this end, the Agency has focussed on two key elements:

- Documentation and formats. The Agency' new guidelines (published in 2018) provide detailed descriptions of each chapter of the external evaluation report which also allow academic Institutions to better comprehend the Evaluation Commission's recommendations. The Evaluation Commission, on the other hand, can use an "interpretation grid" to facilitate the analysis of the institution's SER. Furthermore, although the official languages of the Holy See are seven, the Agency strongly recommends the use of English or alternatively Italian.

- Experts' training. The group of experts is involved in specific training, through ad hoc meetings and a self-training programme in blended learning. The possibility of reorganising this training method for experts is currently being studied.

The Agency is aware of how important the evaluation reports are within the entire evaluation process. They represent the most visible part and probably the most significant source of information for many stakeholders. AVEPRO is committed to continue this work and to support it, overcoming different obstacles. The difficulties linked to the integration of different Higher Education Systems, on the one hand, and the use of multiple languages on the other, may be complicated to handle. The Agency's single reference model, which however allows for flexibility, represents the common basis for all evaluation reports published by the Agency.

As for the use of multiple languages, it is to be stressed that in some contexts this issue is related to the willingness to emphasise cultural proximity, and even protection of a minority.

AVEPRO is committed to support methods that allow the widest possible dissemination of results consistently with the specificities of all the actors involved.

➤ **ESG 2.7 – Periodic Reviews**

The team is hopeful that necessary preparations for the articulation of AVEPRO work and facilitation is under way to assure proper running of the external reviews for all Higher Education Institutions that belong to the system of the Holy See. Respecting international commitments in the Bologna process, all types of Higher Education Institutions, in their own right are expected to take due consideration and action to implement provisions of ESG part I.

As highlighted in the ENQA follow-up report, in addressing this recommendation the Agency highlights three elements:

- AVEPRO's mission to evaluate and promote quality, in particular the culture of quality. This aim can be achieved by building relationships, creating common languages, sharing processes and practices thus avoiding the risks that ecclesiastical academic Institutions consider quality evaluation as a mere bureaucratic obligation.

- Given the resources available, AVEPRO must create a system of alliances with other Agencies and stakeholders by sharing practices and evaluations, building the relationships on a trust system.

- In the process of monitoring the implementation of its guidelines, the Agency will consider to ask its Councils whether it is appropriate to extend the evaluation cycle to 6 or 7 years (as is the case in some European countries and in areas of the USA).

On the basis of these considerations, the topic of available resources is decisive in defining the QA methodologies and domain of operations. This is particularly relevant if the global scale is to be reached. Therefore, it is crucial to identify alternative collaborative strategies (e.g. Memorandum of understanding, joint evaluations, etc.) to join forces with other Agencies especially in the framework of ENQA, so to share the outputs of the evaluations, consistently with the ESG 2015 principles and criteria.

➤ **ESG 3.2 – Official status**

Given the global presence of ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, and the possibility of articulation into the regional subcomponents, the Agency is encouraged to discuss, together with relevant administrative bodies in the Holy See's structures, the necessary prerequisites for the greater international visibility and active involvement in ENQA.

The Agency is aware of how the resources available determine choices and strategies. In redefining its Statute, AVEPRO decided to modify the previous approach that provided for the establishment of "Regional Branches" by inserting a formulation more open to "forms of collaboration".
In this framework, ENQA represents the natural area for these forms of collaboration, believing that in the coming years it will support increased exchange flows among the Agencies, enhancing bonds of trust and mutual learning processes. AVEPRO has had the opportunity to get to know different organisations bearing very different experiences. With some Institutions it has been possible to smoothly reach an agreement to carry out joint evaluations. In other contexts, more formal procedures have been necessary to set off collaborative initiatives with other Agencies members of ENQA.
The involvement of AVEPRO in the coming years will be aimed at supporting a renewal of the challenges summarised by the 2011 EQAF title: "Quality and trust: at the heart of what we do".

➤ **ESG 3.3 – Activities**

The Agency together with relevant units within the Holy See's administrative structures are encouraged to further take actions to secure appropriate staff and other resources enabling to fulfil AVEPRO duties on a five-yearly basis. AVEPRO could also engage in joint activities and benefit from mutual learning with other agencies members of ENQA.

a. Following the visit of the ENQA Review Panel, AVEPRO acted in both directions indicated by the recommendations:

b. On the one hand, AVEPRO has managed to ensure stability to the employed staff (with long-term labour contracts) notwithstanding considerable budget constraints.

c. On the other hand, AVEPRO has been working to strengthen its relationship system with other Agencies with the aim, among others, of carrying out shared evaluations so to facilitate the tasks of academic Institutions (as described in § 4.3 "AVEPRO's international position" and in Chapter 8 "The Agency's international activities").

Furthermore, considering that the evaluation cycle will not take place for all the Institutions every 5 years, the new AVEPRO guidelines liaise follow-up evaluation and strategic planning. This methodology makes evaluation a "continuous" process thus supporting the development of a quality culture that makes the academic Institutions take responsibility vis-à-vis internal Quality Assurance.

➤ **ESG 3.4 – Resources**

The team concludes that the development of the review processes and procedures to meet the needs of the

medium and long-term future will require additional financial resources and significantly increased staffing resources. We recommend that this matter receives the urgent concern of the appropriate offices in the Holy See".

As anticipated in the 2015 and 2016 follow-up reports, the Holy See is undergoing a phase of profound reforms. This will lead to the adoption of a new Apostolic constitution that will replace the *Pastor bonus*. Under the Pontificate of Pope Francis there have been many organisational and managerial innovations that have also had an impact on the Agency. In particular, these changes have entailed the establishment of the Secretariat for Economy, the adoption of Financial Management policies and procedures consistent with the IPSAS (International Public Sector Accounting Standards), the constant request for cost reduction implemented almost by all the countries in Europe. These reforms have been considered necessary so to handle scenarios of growing difficulty in terms of resources availability and compliance with international standards and obligations.

In this context, not only has AVEPRO maintained its financial resources substantially unchanged, but it has strengthened resources and made its work and procedures more efficient.
The Agency used to have a part-time President, two full-time employees with a permanent contract, two external advisors. Currently, it employs four full-time employees and is defining the profile of a fifth one. Also, the two advisors are still fully involved. The Agency also activates contracts on specific projects and is initiating contacts with Foundations and Institutions pursuing a new path for fund-raising supporting innovative initiatives and measures.

However, the Agency is aware that the available resources are not optimal and that strict measures to optimise their use need to be implemented, also implying stronger collaboration with stakeholders and "peer" Agencies. Moreover, AVEPRO can draw on a pool of experts willing to work pro bono because of their commitment to the Church, and that priests and religious subsist on very modest revenues. This distinguishes AVEPRO from any other QA Agency.
Despite all this, evaluations were carried out in 9 countries handling different languages, cultures and legislations, and fostering participation and support from local stakeholders (e.g. the Episcopal Conferences, Religious Orders, other national Agencies). In this way the Agency has been working to put in practice what was indicated in the 2018 Paris Communiqué: "*Quality Assurance is key in developing mutual trust as well as increasing mobility and fair recognition of qualifications and study periods throughout the EHEA*".

➢ **ESG 3.8 – Accountability procedures**

When talking to esteemed members of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council, the Panel saw their dedication to serve the Agency and also willingness to contribute to reconsideration of the current arrangements of these two advisory bodies to more energetically support the Agency's work, at the same time permitting some saving of resources.

As indicated in the 2016 follow-up report, the Institutions of the Roman Curia are generally governed by two Councils, one dealing with organisational issues, the other working on technical matters. Being connected to the Apostolic See [*Pastor bonus*, art. 186], AVEPRO adopted the same organisational model; in its Statute, therefore, two Bodies with different, though complementary competences are established: (a) the Board of Directors and (b) the Scientific Council.
Their areas of competence are clearly defined in the Agency's Statute (articles 6-11). It is also foreseen that small groups (kind of "task forces") can be set up to deal with specific issues.
For example, within the previous Scientific Council a sub-group was created, also involving external experts, which worked for the preparation of the Guidelines for Strategic Planning. Furthermore, within the Board of Directors a technical working group was set up to contribute to the drafting of the "Rationale"[64] of the Evaluation Process proposed by AVEPRO.

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[64] AVEPRO, Ecclesiastical higher education system in the global world. Rationales of AVEPRO evaluation system (Guidelines E).
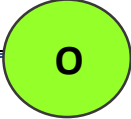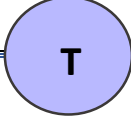
► MAIN EVIDENCES

→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)

→ AVEPRO, Follow Up Reports on ENQA Site Visit (2014 and 2016)

→ AVEPRO, Report on the questionnaire 2019

→ IPSAS standards – IPSAS Board website

→ SUPR /Studenti delle Università Pontificie Romane /Students of the Roman Pontifical Universities website

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

13. SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS — S

- AVEPRO is tasked with the implementation of quality culture in the ecclesiastical academic Institutions becoming part of the great work of reforming ecclesiastical studies initiated by the Second Vatican Council.

- The Agency has a clear and recognisable identity.
  AVEPRO's mission is to foster a quality culture in every single member of the academic community and in every action taken by the Institution. It is a continuous process of enhancement and improvement.

- Through AVEPRO's work, the principles of accountability and the implementation of clear guidelines to support structures, processes and provisions have been embedded in the activity plans of Institutions.

- Through the promotion of quality culture, the Agency has created an innovative system of relations within the great part of ecclesiastical academic Institutions achieving a high degree of acceptance. It is now generally reputed as an expert partner for HEIs.

- AVEPRO has contributed to foster within ecclesiastical HEIs an understanding that quality is a continuous process and that it is necessarily welded into the Institutions' strategic planning and involves all stakeholders.

- AVEPRO's international credibility is related to its openness towards other types of agencies outside the Catholic world.

- Feedback collected from ecclesiastical HEIs suggests that AVEPRO is successfully contributing to place quality culture at the heart of the mission of ecclesiastical HEIs.

- The involvement of advisors and international external experts (e.g. in the frame of external evaluation Commissions, Board of Directors and Scientific Council) contributes to the Agency's effectiveness.

WEAKNESSES — W

- Available financial resources are not corresponding to the Agency's complex tasks.

- The communication about the Agency and its services does not reach all relevant audiences – for example the academic communities (students and Faculties/teaching staff).

- The Agency's function is sometimes perceived as mere "control" rather than as "quality promotion and evaluation" in collaboration with the HEIs e.g. the Agency is not involved in the HEIs' evaluation cycle, except during the site visits.

- In order to assure fruitful collaboration with local stakeholders it is necessary to overcome problems related to languages, organizations, logistics etc. This aspect becomes crucial when considering the universal dimension of the Agency.

- Existing non-national and transversal networks in the Church are not enough used (e.g. Religious Orders which have a worldwide presence).

- The training of the experts in the External Evaluation Commissions needs to be constantly updated and improved (due to different legal frameworks, languages, local situations, etc.)

- AVEPRO has not any system of incentives/ sanctions for the academic Institutions it evaluates.

| O | OPPORTUNITIES | T | THREATS |

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
➤ The innovations in the *Veritatis gaudium* offer the possibility to reconsider quality criteria thus generating an impact on the whole Academic system. ➤ The Agency can rely on a global network of individuals and Institutions that share the same commitment "to be in service of a greater Good" and that can contribute to the further consideration of the quality culture. ➤ The Agency has to increasingly invest in fostering the quality culture and the related quality evaluation mechanisms. ➤ The cross-fertilisation of QA methodologies and toolsets that could result from the Agency's action beyond European borders, could foster the implementation of a shared quality culture in a global perspective.	➤ If the budget does not increase, this may generate obstacles for the Agency's future action especially in other (non-EU) Countries. ➤ The Agency must not neglect networks/ alliances to promote QA culture in Europe and beyond. Not investing in networking could generate a lack of consensus/support among stakeholders. ➤ The need to "comply" with quality criteria should not affect the identity of the study programmes in ecclesiastical HEIs. ➤ When acting at global scale, the application of the ESG could cause a sort of "academic colonialism / standardisation". The necessary flexibility for global application must be granted.

A more detailed description of the SWOT Analysis is presented in Annex 4.

14. Current challenges and areas for future development

Arising from the SWOT Analysis and considering the contents presented in the other Chapters of this SAR, a number of challenges and opportunities are underway. Each implies the imperative for AVEPRO to develop clear directions for the resolution of issues and the seizure of opportunities in respect of service to the Church, its own operations and sustainability, and the significant enhancement of quality in the activities of the Institutions within its jurisdiction. These will find expression in the next iteration of AVEPRO's Strategic Plan, which will be formulated in the Spring of 2020, with a likely 10 year planning horizon. The following paragraphs indicate some of the major elements to be considered.

Implementation of the Veritatis gaudium. Within the Holy See's Higher Education system, one of the main challenges of the next decade (at least) will be the way in which academic Institutions will implement the innovations introduced by the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium.* All Institutions are engaged to support a process that brings theology, philosophy and other disciplines closer to contemporary challenges, introducing a mechanism of constant dynamism of knowledge that is firmly based on teaching and research, connected with society (third mission) and built around students' needs. As a matter of fact, the real centre of the system is significantly the student community. Article 3, § 2 of the Apostolic Constitution, contains extremely innovative aspects in this sense: "*to train students in their own disciplines according to Catholic doctrine at a high qualification level, conveniently prepare them to face their tasks, and promote ongoing or permanent training in ministers of the Church*". The centrality of the student or learner is not confined to the university experience alone but it is clearly indicated that the academic Institutions must prepare more and more to face tasks or to prepare for the "professional" paths, thus opening a series of links to concepts such as learning outcomes and skills development.

"Quality maturity" of ecclesiastical academic Institutions. As regards the ecclesiastical academic Institutions, in the coming years they will necessarily have to handle the challenge of embedding the quality culture and strategic planning within their operations. In this respect, AVEPRO is expected to support Institutions' processes for continuous improvement of their services and structures.

"Quality maturity" of the Agency. Connected to this, the Agency also needs to complete its "maturation process" with the aim of increasing its activities for "promotion" and "enhancement" of quality so to contribute to the further development of the whole system of Higher Education of the Holy See. This would imply supporting the shift from "just" compliance towards a quality culture which allows to embed a strategic vision in the Institutions' planning and operations. Therefore, the Agency needs to adapt its communication strategy so to reach the relevant audiences, stimulating new forms of networking and further acceptance of the quality culture.

Global reach. In the coming years another challenge will emerge, namely the need to deal with non-European academic realities. *Veritatis gaudium* is very clear about this point: it attributes to AVEPRO the mandate to deal with the quality of all the Higher Education Institutions of the Holy See. The evaluation model will have to demonstrate its flexibility, the Agency will have to value a number of good practices, among which a few experiences developed in projects involving ENQA (e.g. the project called "Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation").

A possible outcome resulting from the combination of these challenges (already anticipated in the 10th Meeting of AVEPRO's Board of Directors) may be the concrete intention to define "Global Standards and guidelines" that can be applied in a flexible still integrated manner to the entire Higher Education system of the Holy See.

The Agency is also anticipating and handling two additional system-wide challenges:

   a. the fact that study/academic programmes increasingly have to integrate transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, with the aim of giving answers to complex and concrete themes that cannot be confined to single disciplinary areas;

   b. the need to ensure that academic Institutions are aware of the scenario where they are operating, acting with an open attitude inspired by dialogue and aimed at supporting networking at national and international scale.

Moreover, the SWOT Analysis (see Annex 4) highlights other challenges, e.g.:

→ continuing improvement of HEI capacity and quality in e.g. internationalisation; research strategy and the Ph.D.; institutional sustainability governance of HEIs especially in relation to Quality Assurance,

→ raising visibility of AVEPRO as a serious force globally,

→ enhancing the impact of Reports on the strategies and activities of HEI,

→ support the development of quality culture through follow-up processes linking quality improvement with strategic planning,

→ because of a long tradition, most ecclesiastical HEIs have understood themselves more as training Institutions, for ministers of the Church, than as research Institutions. To keep path with international standards in Higher Education, research needs to be stressed and carried out in a more planned way, without losing pedagogic care and *momentum*.

In these respects, the Agency will have to support and innovate its practices and procedures to offer insights and contributions to the academic community. In this way the role of quality promotion will reinforce its practical application.

The purpose of all this is the renewal of learning paths in a logic of service addressing the global and positive aims of humanity as indicated in the Document on "Human Fraternity for world peace and living together" signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, in February 2019 in Abu Dhabi.

The Agency is aware that the issue of limited resources will stay in its agenda for years. In this respect, AVEPRO will consider the possibility to be innovative in tackling many of the above-mentioned challenges, pooling existing resources (such as personnel, assets, logistics, equipment, etc.). The driving force of AVEPRO's strategy will be networking, with Institutions belonging to the Holy See's system, and with other Institutions and agencies, in Europe and beyond.

All these challenges contribute to define a long-term strategic approach. In its pursuit, the Agency may have to adopt a ten-year plan. The ENQA evaluation visit and the panel's following recommendations will provide insights and support, useful to define the strategic framework, the main challenges and opportunities that the Agency will face in implementing this ambitious process.

► MAIN EVIDENCES
→ Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)
→ Document on "Human Fraternity for world peace and living together" signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019)
→ ENQA - HAQAA Initiative "Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation" (2016)

The complete list of evidences and references is presented in Annex 1.

ENQA REVIEW

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

2019