In ACTION

Biannual Newsletter

SINAES
Sistema Nacional de Acreditación
de la Educación Superior

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Index of Acronyms

SINAES	**National System for Higher Education Accreditation**
HIES	**Higher Education Institutions**
ED	**Executive Directorate**
ILPEM	**Special Improvement Project Results Report**
ACCM	**Improvement Commitment Compliance Progress**
PCPE	**Proposed Curriculum Changes**
INQAAHE	*International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*
FECIES	**International Forum on Quality Assessment in Research and Higher Education**
NAC	**National Accreditation Council**
GA	**Evaluation and Accreditation Managers**
ONEI	**National Observatory of Inclusive Education in Costa Rica**
SINCA-JUSTICIE	**National System of Quality and Accreditation for Justice**
INDEIN	**Division of Research, Development, and Innovation of SINAES**
EAV	**Virtual Academic Events**
STEAM	*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*
LATINSOTL	**Latin American Network of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**
PROF-XXI	**Teaching and Learning Centers for Latin American Universities in the 21st century**
STHEMI	**Consorcio de IES Brasileiras e LASPAU**
CINDA	**Inter-University Development Center**
DSAG	**Division of Management Support Services of SINAES**
HR	**Human Resources**
TI	**Information Technology**
CALED	**Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education**

Message from the Executive Directorate

The National System for Higher Education Accreditation would like to share its progress with Costa Rican society and the affiliated HEIs. For this purpose, a new edition of "SINAES in Action" is published every six months.

This fourth issue of SINAES in Action summarizes the main institutional achievements of 2021.

Our work in numbers

3 new higher education institutions (HEIs) joined the National System for Higher Education Accreditation (SINAES, for its acronym in Spanish).

47 undergraduate or graduate programs were either accredited for the first time or re-accredited last year.

47 external assessment visits, 13 by ILPEM and 56 by ACCM, were carried out in 2021.

In 2021, the System engaged the services of more than 240 professionals from 16 different countries to address the different phases of the accreditation processes.

11 virtual academic events were held in 2021.

We began the implementation of a Digital Strategy that involved redesigning our website and strengthening our social media presence.

We were part of the National Qualification Framework's technical team and the Inter-Institutional Commission of Project Administrators (CIAP, for its acronym in Spanish).

We adapted to the demands of the virtual world to continue fulfilling our mission.

70 certificates were awarded in 29 ceremonies at the premises of 16 HEIs.

24 degree programs were officially accredited for the first time, while 22 others revalidated their right to continue using the SINAES seal of quality last year.

SINAES submitted the Self-Assessment Report to the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE,). It is now certified as a Guidelines of Good Practices-aligned agency.

The XII Edition of the Keynote Conference SINAES brought together academics from 17 countries.
We were also present at the FECIES Forum.

We consolidated our internal structure.

SINAES participated in the Inter-Institutional Commission of Project Administrators (CIAP) and helping the technical team of the National Qualifications Framework for Education programs furnished to the Ministry of Public Education (MPE).

INQAAHE certified SINAES as a Guidelines of Good Practices aligned agency

INQAAHE certified SINAES as a Guidelines of Good Practices aligned agency. So in that sense, we want to highlight this significant achievement of SINAES and the HEIs.

The world-renowned International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) certified that SINAES complies with internally accepted good practices.

With this award, the System also complies with Article 12, paragraph E of Act No. 8256, and its duty as a member of the Inter-Institutional Transparency Network.

This certification is valid until 2024.

SINAES Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior

The Official Accreditation Body for Higher Education in Costa Rica
is an accreditation body that complies with the internally accepted guidelines of good practice of the

INQAAHE Since 1991

M.Sc. Laura Ramírez Saborío
Executive Director, SINAES

1. The System Grows

1.1 Member Institutions

In 2021, three more universities joined the National System for Higher Education Accreditation. They are Universidad Santa Lucía, Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional, and the Universidad Liderazgo, Experiencia, Avance Desarrollo (ULEAD).

SINAES began operating in 1999 with eight universities. Currently, the system is made up of the following 36 higher education institutions.

1.		Universidad de Costa Rica	1999
2.		Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica	1999
3.		Universidad Nacional (UNA)	1999
4.		Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED)	1999
5.		Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología (ULACIT)	1999
6.		Universidad Latina de Costa Rica	1999
7.		Universidad Veritas	1999
8.		Universidad Católica de Costa Rica	2001
9.		Universidad de Ciencias Médicas (UCIMED)	2002
10.		Universidad de Iberoamérica (UNIBE)	2003
11.		Universidad EARTH	2005
12.		Universidad Hispanoamericana (UH)	2005
13.		Universidad para la Paz	2008
14.		Universidad Escuela Libre de Derecho	2009
15.		Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE)	2010
16.		Universidad Autónoma de Centro América (UACA)	2010
17.		Universidad Santa Paula	2010
18.		Universidad Fidélitas	2012
19.		Escuela Técnica Agrícola e Industrial (ETAI)	2014
20.		Colegio Universitario de Cartago	2014
21.		INVENIO	2014
22.		Universidad Internacional de las Américas (UIA)	2016

23.		Universidad Técnica Nacional (UTN)	2016
24.		Universidad Federada de Costa Rica	2016
25.		Universidad San Marcos (USAM)	2017
26.		Universidad Americana (UAM)	2017
27.		Universidad Internacional San Isidro Labrador (UISIL)	2017
28.		Universidad CENFOTEC	2017
29.		Universidad Florencio del Castillo	2017
30.		PLERUS	2017
31.		Colegio Universitario Creativo	2017
32.		Universidad La Salle	2018
33.		CUNLIMON	2019
34.		Universidad Santa Lucía	2021
35.		Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional	2021
36.		Universidad Liderazgo, Experiencia, Avance, Desarrollo (ULEAD)	2021

1.2 Agreements adopted by the National Accreditation Council in 2021

According to information provided by the Secretariat of the National Accreditation Council (NAC), the following are part of the council's 2021 results.

The NAC held
87 sessions
most of them were virtual

The NAC adopted
304 agreements

2. Evaluation and Accreditation

As of December 2021, there are over 224 degrees and programs accredited by SINAES.

Chart 1. **Number of accredited and re-accredited programs and degrees, 2021**

Year	Accreditations	Re-accreditations
2021	24	22

Source: Information Management. February 2022.

Chart 2. **Number of visits, ACCM, ILPEM and reconsiderations**

Description	Total
External assessment visits	47
ILPEM review visits	13
ACCM reviews	56
Reconsideration reviews	2

Source: Information Management. February 2022.

Charto 3. **Number of PCPEs received by field of knowledge**

In 2021, we received 25 Curriculum Change Proposals (PCPE, for its acronym in Spanish), which are distributed as follows based on their respective field of knowledge:

Field of knowledge	Quantity
Health sciences	8
Economic sciences	4
Social sciences	4
Computer science	4
Education	1
Engineering	4
TOTAL	25

Source: Curriculum Management. February 2022.

2.1 Number of professionals hired

In 2021, SINAES hired **241 experts** from various fields of knowledge to serve as peer reviewers (57 national peers and 107 international peers), reviewers of ACCM and ILPEM, or reviewers of accreditation results reconsideration requests.

Legend:
- International peers
- Grand total
- International ACCM reviewers
- National ACCM reviewers
- National ILPEM reviewers
- International reconsideration request reviewers
- National peers
- National reviewers - remarks concerning the Final Peer-Review Report
- International ILPEM reviewers
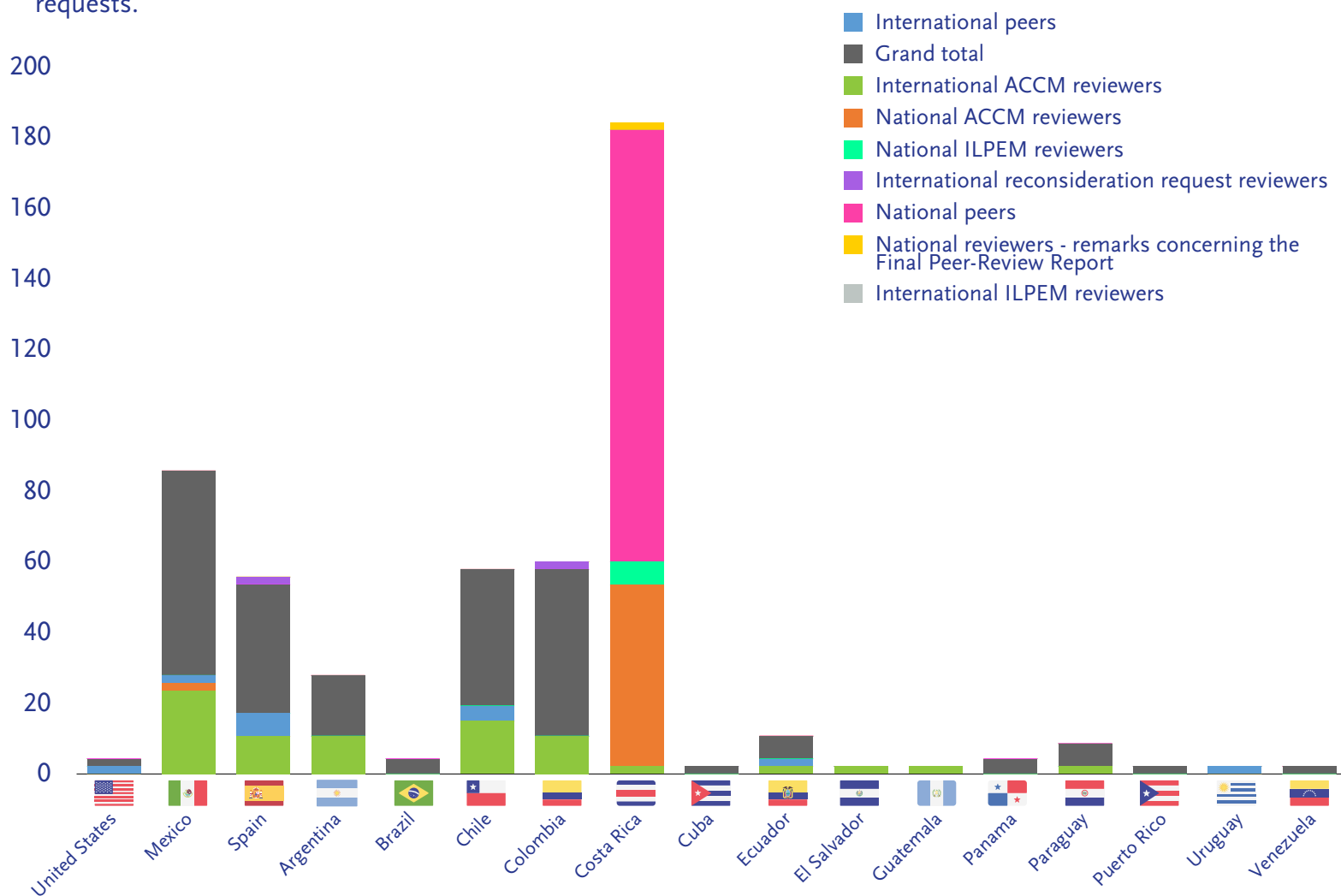
2.2 Training activities

In 2021, we conducted multiple training and introductory sessions regarding the stages of the accreditation process. Moreover, we also conducted introductory sessions with the Self-Assessment Committees, teams of external evaluators, reviewers of Improvement Commitment Compliance Progress (AACM) reports, reviewers of Special Improvement Project Results Report(ILPEM), and reviewers of accreditation results reconsideration requests. These activities are executed by Evaluation and Accreditation Managers (GA).

For its part, the SINAES Curriculum Manager held onboarding meetings with the HEIs, as well as with the disciplinary experts hired to review the Curriculum Change Proposals (PCPE) of accredited degrees and programs of private universities.

Finally, several meetings were held with representatives of international accreditation agencies, representatives of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica, as well as with representatives of newly affiliatedHEIs.

2.3 Additional activities

- ✓ Representations of SINAES before the National Qualifications Framework, SINCA-Justice, and ONEI

- ✓ Accreditation Model Proposal

- ✓ Technical criteria for the Legislative Assembly

- ✓ Updated guidelines for external assessment visits and review of ACCM

- ✓ Systematizations in the Register of Experts and preselection of candidates

3. Research, Development, and Innovation
Division of Research, Development, and Innovation (INDEIN)

In 2021, the Division of Research, Development, and Innovation (INDEIN) conducted various actions employing a collaborative approach and leveraging inter-institutional work and mutual learning to drive innovation and quality improvements in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) affiliated to SINAES and their accredited degrees and programs. The main results of the programs and projects implemented during this period are shared below:

3.1 Research for innovation in higher education

Virtual assessment of the External Assessment processes and reviews of the Improvement Commitment Compliance Progress (ACCM)

The systematization of the results associated with SINAES accreditation began in 2021. Even though the external assessment process was virtual this time, it was well-received by the external and internal parties that participated in these processes. Once of the main findings is that there is a trend towards mixed evaluation modalities, especially in the case of re-accredited programs.

The ACCM reviewers and the representatives of the degrees/programs that have participated in the virtual ACCM reviews, during the mid-term accreditation period, positively assessed the internal process and procedure applied in the virtual modality.

Active Learning and its Contribution to Pedagogical Mediation in Virtual Learning Environments During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prospective Challenges

We systematized the results of the SINAES-LASPAU training programs on Active Learning Methodologies and their application to the virtualization of courses by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This analysis showed a positive evaluation of the usefulness of the learnings developed for virtual pedagogical mediation, and also identified some challenges for HEIs and higher education degrees and programs, among which stands out the need for the transformations of current pedagogical models, which were mostly designed for face-to-face learning.

Stakeholder Feedback Processes

For the INDEIN, it is very important to know the perspective, needs, and expectations of SINAES's stakeholders. For this reason, the Division periodically carries out consultation processes with the participation of affiliated HEIs and accredited programs, based on different topics, which allow us to work on specific actions to support the quality of higher education. During this period, two consultation processes called *"Diagnosis on features of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the University"* and *"Development needs of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) affiliated to SINAES"* were conducted. We thank the HEIs and accredited degrees for their participation in these diagnostic processes.

State of the Art Systematic Literature Review on the Quality of Higher Education

The INDEIN conducted four state of the art systematic literature reviews that provided valuable data feedback for the work of SINAES, HEIs, and accredited degrees and programs, the results of which will be disseminated in the first four Virtual Academic Events in 2022. The topics addressed by these state of the art systematic literature reviews were:

1 "The Accreditation of Higher Education in the World: Transformations During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Prospective Challenges".

2 "Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Programs in Latin America: Achievements and Prospective Challenges".

3 "Research as a Quality Criterion for the Training of Professionals in the 21st Century".

4 "Curricular Transformations During the COVID 19 Pandemic".

3.2 Training and Knowledge Transfer

Virtual Academic Events (EAV)

In 2021, the INDEIN conducted 11 EAVs, gathering 3,952 people from different countries, sectors, and educational bodies. Topics such as global competencies, research as a quality criterion, autonomous learning, Universal Design for Learning, experiences regarding the virtualization of courses, and the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of HEIs, among others, were addressed.

The videos of these EAVs have been viewed around 2,094 times and are available on the SINAES YouTube channel. The V Event, which dealt with the topic of research as a criterion of quality in higher education, stood out with 306 views.

"STEM CR 2.0" Training Program

In 2021, the "STEM CR 2.0" Program on Methodologies for Active Learning, which was developed with the support of LASPAU, an organization affiliated with Harvard University, was completed. A total of 161 educators from 28 HEIs affiliated to SINAES were certified. In addition, the educators prepared a total of 161 innovative pedagogical projects in the courses they teach at their respective universities.

"Foundations for Research in Teaching and Learning" Training Program

During this period, the "Foundations for Research in Teaching and Learning" program, which was developed with the support of LASPAU, an organization affiliated with Harvard University, was also completed. A total of 52 educators from 18 HEIs affiliated to SINAES were certified. In addition, the teachers wrote around 50 academic papers that constituted the final projects of the training program, some of which were conducted collaboratively.

"Student-Centered Learning and its Assessment" Training Workshops

Two training workshops designed based on the flipped classroom methodology were conducted on the Moodle platform:

A *"Student-centered learning and tools for its application"* workshop.

B *"Assessment of competencies for health sciences degrees"* workshop.

A total of **55 representatives from 24 HEIs affiliated to SINAES participated.**

"Research as a Cross-Cutting Issue for Quality in Higher Education" Training Workshop

A workshop entitled *"Research as a Cross-Cutting Issue for Quality in Higher Education"* was held with the collaboration of two national experts. The goal of this project was to promote a vision of research as a cross-cutting issue of university culture, which permeates the academic actions of all higher education institutions. A total of 25 educators from 20 HEIs affiliated to SINAES participated in the workshop. These educators jointly developed five strategies to raise awareness on this topic.

International Partnership for the Publication of the Digital Book Titled *"Innovar y Transformar desde las disciplinas: Experiencias Clave en la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe 2021-2022"*

SINAES is participating in a high-impact international project that involves institutions from diverse geographical areas and brings together international bodies, such as Universidad de Chile (University of Chile, if translated), LASPAU, LATINSOTL, PROF XXI, STHETI, CINDA, and SINAES. The project consists of the publication of a digital book titled *"Innovar y Transformar desde las disciplinas: Experiencias Clave en la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe 2021-2022"* (Innovation and Transformation from a Disciplines stance:

Key Experiences in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021-2022, if translated).

This international alliance allowed SINAES-accredited programs to participate through the publication of academic articles. To date, 74 articles have been approved, including several academic publications by Costa Rican authors.

The INDEIN will continue working to develop programs and projects in an effort to drive innovation and the improvement of the quality of higher education in furtherance of the mission of SINAES.

4. Academic Participation

✅ EDUTIC Congress (Chile, online) on *"Quality in Higher Education"*.

✅ Article and lecture *"SINAES in Times of Pandemic: The Opportunity for Invention"*. Authors: Gerardo Mirabelli Biamonte and Laura Ramírez Saborío. *"Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Vision of Accreditation Agencies"*, coordinated by the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education (CALED, for its acronym in Spanish).

✅ Interview in the regional radio station of the ETAI, *"Radio Santa Clara"*, on *"Contribution of accreditation processes with SINAES to the improvement of education in the Northern Huetar Region"*.

✅ Research Congress. *"Learnings from the Pandemic"*, hosted by Universidad Hispanoamericana.

5.5. Positioning and Social Networks

5.1 New website

In October 2021, SINAES launched its new website, featuring multiple improvements:

- ✅ A more modern design.
- ✅ Improved user experience.
- ✅ Addition of "A" accessibility criteria for people with disabilities.
- ✅ Easier to update.
- ✅ Word Press content manager.
- ✅ Addition of an important new feature: it has a tab to search for officially accredited undergraduate and graduate programs.
- ✅ Dynamic counter that displays the up-to-date number of accredited programs.
- ✅ Better organization of essential documents, such as minutes, manuals, guides, among others.
- ✅ Quick user access to the FAQ section and the search tab.
- ✅ Adaptive features (responsive design), allowing it to be viewed from any type of browser, computer, tablet, or smartphone.
- ✅ The new website has had over 10 thousand visits.

5.2 Digital strategy

Last year, SINAES, in addition to the new website, strengthened its presence in social media.

It now has presence in:

More than **77 thousand followers**, most of them between 25 and 34 years old.

More than **800 followers,** while the "Register of Experts" page has **650 followers.**

A Twitter profile was created two months ago.

It has over **480 followers** and more than 50 videos of Virtual Academic Events are available.

In 2021, the SINAES Communication Area, in conjunction with member institutions, successfully organized a total of **29 accreditation ceremonies** on the premises of the following 16 institutions:

- The Thirteenth Edition of the Keynote Conference: SINAES Enrique Góngora Trejos, Higher Education and Society, was successfully organized. A total of 430 national and international representatives of the academic sector attended the event, and a perfect score was obtained in practically all the aspects evaluated. It has been the edition with the highest international participation, with 17 countries.

- As for the Virtual Academic Events, more than 30 press releases were issued, 2,684 certificates of participation were sent, and the EAVs got over 2,000 views on YouTube.

- The Communication Area organized or participated in 5 virtual activities for guidance counselors and high school students.

- A Crisis Management Handbook was prepared, and institutional spokespersons were trained.

- A press management plan was implemented, and key institutional messages were defined.

- More than 500 queries from external users were answered, and more than one hundred updates were made to the website.

- The Communication Area sent out 47 editions of the internal bulletin *"Así vamos"* (Our progress, if translated), as well as more than 1,100 short notes.

- Two editions of the *SINAES en Acción* (SINAES in Action, if translated) newsletter were sent.

- More than 50 bulletins were sent through Mailchimp.

- The Communication Area actively supported the Inter-Institutional Commission of the National Qualifications Framework.

6. 6. Progress of the Management Support Services Division (DSAG)

In 2021, the **teleworking** modality continued, which has allowed a reduction of up to 50% in the response times of internal and external requests sent to the Reception Area of SINAES.

The Procurement Area closed a total of **230 professional agreements** to provide services related to the substantive activities of SINAES. At an institutional level, a process is being developed to shorten the time required to hire external evaluators.

In 2021, the Procurement Area processed 78 agreements (39 through direct procurement and 39 through summary tender proceedings). Likewise, this office took measures to ensure that SINAES complies with the provisions of the General Public Procurement Act, approved on May 2021.

Thanks to the Human Resources (HR) management, SINAES officers continued to receive training to improve their skills and provide better services, completing a total of **167 training sessions, which amounted to 3,729 hours of training.**

Human Resources also made progress in the implementation of a **Performance Evaluation** tool for SINAES officers.

The Accounting Area, in line with the environmental commitment of SINAES, **reduced the use of paper by 100%, and currently,** the transactional vouchers, accounting books, reconciliations, and financial statements are issued and stored only in electronic and digital format.

In addition, in 2021, the Accounting Area, together with the Information Technology Area and specialized suppliers, implemented **computer programs that guarantee the backup, safeguarding, and security of digital documentation.**

Budget: as of 2021, a series of new management practices and a monthly follow-up with the different divisions were implemented to optimize the institution's budget implementation percentages.

Last year, the Treasury processed **82 transactions through the Unified Cash Management system and 181 international payments, issued 107 invoices, and paid 111.**

As for the progress that SINAES made in Information Technology (IT) in 2021, the following stand out: improved information security, development of applications, secure digital workspaces, better equipment, higher level of electronic communication, greater access to IT systems, and implementation of remote work and technological solutions that will persist over time.

7. Transparency
Progress on Internal Audit issues YEAR 2021

SINAES Internal Audit has its own strategic framework:	• Strategic Plan 2021-2025 • Annual Work Plans were duly delivered to the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic.
In 2021, the audits covered the following areas of the Institution:	•Quality management •Internal control •Budget management •Engagement of external evaluators •Information technology management framework
The Internal Audit of SINAES has complied with the duties vested in it by the General Internal Control Act:	•Authorization of accounting books •Authorization of the National Accreditation Council's books of minutes •Advising and warning the National Accreditation Council

To learn more about the work of SINAES's Internal Audit, its reports, strategies, and policies, visit the SINAES website **https://www.sinaes.ac.cr/transparencia/auditoria-interna/**

8. Internal Improvements
Quality

After 2018, and with the creation of the DEA, INDEIN, and DSAG, a total of **287 documents have been prepared, of which 16 procedures, 25 guidelines, 109 forms, 3 instruction manuals, and 3 guides were approved in 2021.**

The SINAES procedures are documents that allow the standardization of SINAES processes, not only to drive efficiency and efficacy in their execution but also to serve as the bases for review and continuous improvement.

Visit our website
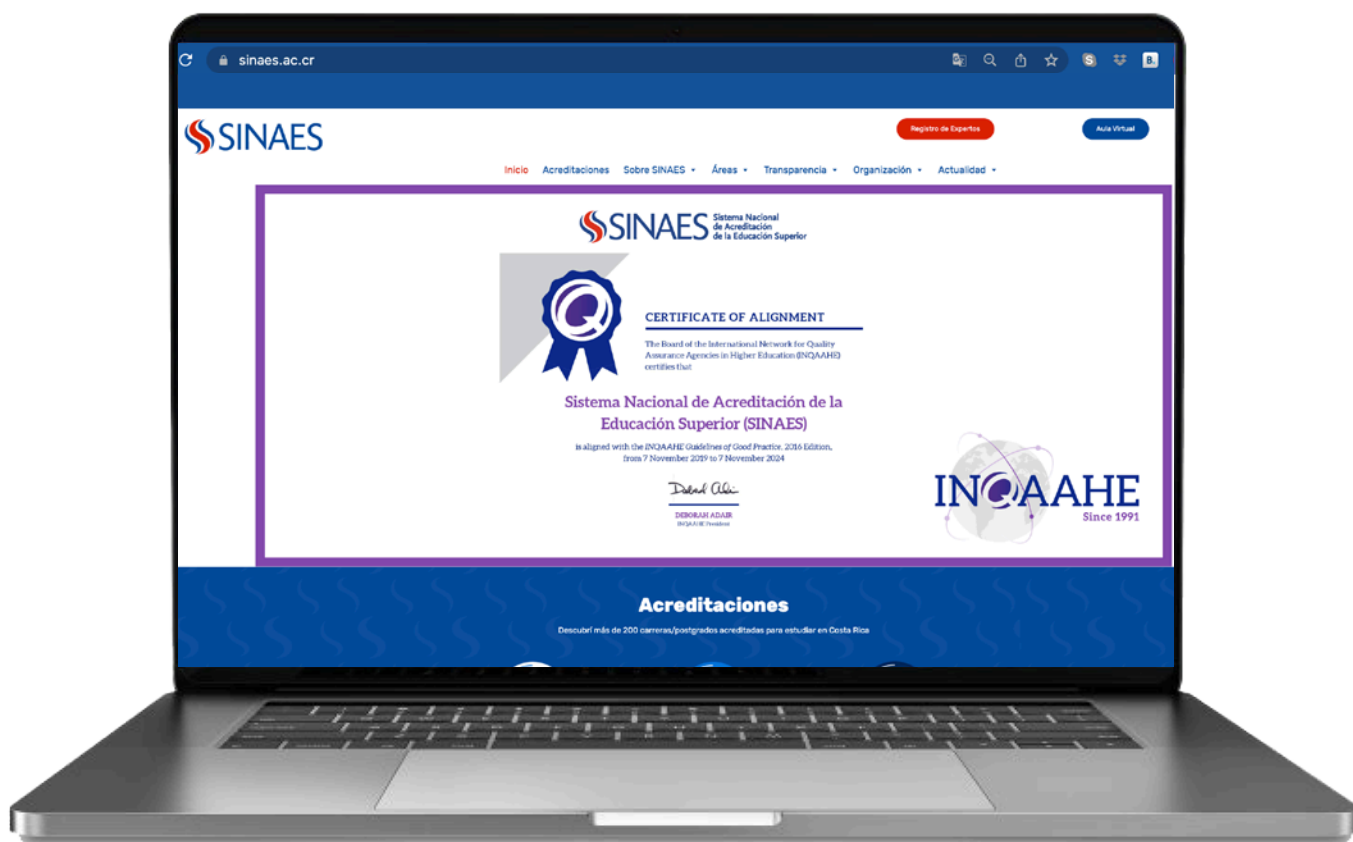
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This document was coordinated by the Communication Process of the National System for Higher Education Accreditation, with contributions from:

The National Accreditation Council (NAC)

The Executive Directorate (EXD)

The Evaluation and Accreditation Division (DEA)

The Research, Development, and Innovation Division (INDEIN)

The Division of Management Support Services (DSAG)