



# AQU CATALUNYA STRATEGIC PLAN

2015 - 2018



Agència  
per a la Qualitat  
del Sistema Universitari  
de **Catalunya**



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Sistema Universitari de Catalunya**

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2001 AQU Catalunya published what was the initial blueprint for a strategic plan for the Agency in its Action Plan for quality enhancement in the university system in Catalonia for the period through until 2007. The contents of this plan were quickly fulfilled as it was put into effect and the activities developed.

The first actual Strategic Plan (2009-2012) established the basis and main areas for the Agency's strategic thrust and was produced by way of a broad participatory process involving both in-house and external input. The majority of the strategic and operational objectives were reasonably and efficiently achieved, and in the case of objectives where this was not possible it was because adaptation to new and changed contexts and circumstances was required.

The Strategic Plan for 2015-2018, which is set out below, was also produced by way of a participatory process, with the benefit of previous experience gained from complying with and fulfilling the previous Strategic Plan, together with the analysis of shortcomings, hazards, strengths and opportunities detected by staff at AQU Catalunya.

The main new development in this Strategic Plan is its alignment with a mission and overview ("the big picture") within which the Agency's intended model for quality assurance and enhancement is defined. The Plan takes on a more concise form than the previous one, while retaining six main areas of strategic thrust: the quality assurance (QA) of institutions

(institutional review); the quality assurance of teaching (teaching staff assessment); knowledge generation and transfer; internationalisation; strategic management; and internal organisation.

Regardless of the concise draft and the summarised contents, this Strategic Plan covers a series of dynamic ideas for the improvement and enhancement of both the university system in Catalonia and the Agency itself, which include an increasingly greater commitment to institutional review over (study) programme review; the drive to improve teaching staff assessment as a more useful and efficient instrument for establishing academic staff policies; further enhancement to knowledge generation and transfer in order for added value to feed back into the university system for decision-making; and the resolve to provide support and help the universities underpin their internationalisation policies. All of this, in addition to maintaining the Agency's current standing and level of recognition at international level, improving the level of stakeholder satisfaction (universities, staff and students) and, of course, maintaining a reliable staff workforce that is competent, flexible and efficient.

This Strategic Plan is the blueprint that defines the Agency's current strategic and operational objectives that will enable it to accomplish its mission and vision up until 2018. Indicators will be used to measure and quantify the level of achievement of these objectives.

# THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2015-2018

## MISSION

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (*Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya*, hereinafter AQU Catalunya) is a public entity with an internationally recognised status. Its mission is to assure the quality of higher education through compliance with international standards of quality and to safeguard the interests of society in the quality of higher education.

The Agency's activities are developed through:

- External quality assurance procedures involving analysis, review, certification, audit and accreditation
- International benchmarks and an innovation-based perspective
- Transparency and public availability
- The involvement of the educational community and social stakeholders
- People who are competent, motivated and satisfied with their work and that of AQU Catalunya
- Respect for established values

## OVERVIEW (“The Big Picture”)

AQU Catalunya is an independent agent in the university system in Catalonia that supports higher education institutions with the quality assurance of study programmes, academic staff and faculties, for which institutions themselves are ultimately responsible. The focus of the Agency’s work and activities at both national and international level revolves around knowledge generation as a way to support the universities and university education in a global context.



## VALUES

AQU Catalunya operates in accordance with the following series of values:

- **Integrity and independence:** The activities of AQU Catalunya demonstrate its independence, flexibility and equanimity, and judgments and decisions made by the Agency are fundamentally evidence-based.
- **Quality assurance:** AQU Catalunya assures the quality of its activities through regular internal and external review and evaluation of its procedures in accordance with international standards.
- **User orientation:** AQU Catalunya offers an efficient, personalised and fast service that is sensitive to user requirements, and it enforces the rights of users by providing information on the corresponding mechanisms.
- **Transparency and accountability:** AQU Catalunya provides for transparency and has an information system that provides accessible, comprehensible and usable data on its activities and methodologies.
- **Fostering of cooperation:** AQU Catalunya jointly promotes actions with higher education institutions, government authorities and other national and international agencies and bodies with similar interests.
- **Respect for diversity and university autonomy:** AQU Catalunya is attentive to the pluralistic nature of higher education institutions, their full freedom to organise and run themselves and their capability for self-governance.
- **Proactivity:** AQU Catalunya is proactive in developing and carrying out its actions, it anticipates the necessary requirements for its actions and it provides solutions that are in the public interest.
- **Efficacy and efficiency:** AQU Catalunya achieves its objectives through the optimisation of its available human and physical resources.

## STRATEGIC AREAS OF PRIORITY

### Strategic priority 1. Institutional Quality

#### VISION

We play a key role in the quality enhancement of university institutions and programmes in Catalonia, which serves to enhance the presence and standing of everything that the university system in Catalonia represents at international level.

#### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- 1. Promotion of the quality enhancement of higher education institutions and programmes through an efficient cyclical programme of review and assessment that takes into account the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and uses and applies international benchmarks**
  - 1.1. Implementation of a model for institutional review and assessment.
  - 1.2. Optimisation of the model for programme review with an enhanced orientation towards efficiency and decision-making, and greater interaction between the universities.
- 2. Reinforcement of the quality culture in the university system in Catalonia**
  - 2.1. An increase in the participation of those in charge of internal QA systems and study programme coordinators in review and assessment procedures.
  - 2.2. Inclusion of the entire university community in the development of the quality culture.
- 3. Impetus to methodological developments**
  - 3.1. Regular upgrading of QA methodologies.
  - 3.2. Development of QA methodology innovation projects.

## Strategic priority 2. Quality of Teaching Staff and Teaching

### VISION

We work to assure and enhance the quality of teaching staff and teaching in the university system in Catalonia and provide support for the improvement of policies for teaching staff.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- 4. The quality enhancement of teacher and teaching assessment procedures and greater stakeholder satisfaction**
  - 4.1. Adaptation of, and improvements to, the benchmarks for the different QA procedures, in accordance with the corresponding international requirements.
  - 4.2. Improvements to the review and assessment procedure.
  - 4.3. Improvements to information and the impact of the review and assessment procedure.
- 5. Contributions to the improvement of policies for teaching staff at Catalonia universities**
  - 5.1. Identification and dissemination of good practices regarding policies for teaching staff at Catalonia universities.
  - 5.2. Collaboration in policies dealing with the definition and review of the academic careers of teaching staff.

## Strategic priority 3. Knowledge Generation and Transfer

### VISION

We lead and encourage knowledge generation and transfer in collaboration with the stakeholders within the context of the international perspective, and use of this is shared for decision-making.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- 6. The Agency is an international leader in current projects to generate knowledge and is committed to innovation and the development of new projects, with the participation of the university system in Catalonia**
  - 6.1. Consolidation at international level of current and ongoing projects.
  - 6.2. Identification of new opportunities for projects and/or studies in higher education, and the development of projects that address this.
- 7. The sharing of acquired knowledge for the purposes of decision-making**
  - 7.1. The building of a network for the dissemination of knowledge.
  - 7.2. Better processing of information to facilitate decision-making.
- 8. Consolidation of an up-to-date system of commonly agreed and meaningful indicators for the university system in Catalonia**
  - 8.1. Upgrading and expansion of the indicator system.
  - 8.2. Presentation of relevant information according to the target audience.

## Strategic priority 4. Internationalisation

### VISION

We play a leading role in international developments concerning the quality assurance of higher education institutions, and we pursue a policy of cooperation and alliances that enhances the international profile of the university system in Catalonia.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

#### **9. Participation in decision-making processes in international QA bodies**

- 9.1. Enhancement of the role of AQU Catalunya in the main international organisations and networks and their decision-making bodies.
- 9.2. Continuation of our active participation in and support for international projects.
- 9.3. The assurance that knowledge acquired in international activities comes back to AQU Catalunya and contributes to enhancing the skills and capabilities of the human capital of both the Agency and the university system as a whole in Catalonia.

#### **10. Support for and fostering of the internationalisation of the university system in Catalonia**

- 10.1. The critical adaptation of QA procedures and support for the objectives of internationalisation as regards both study programmes run and delivered in Catalonia and those run by Catalan universities abroad in order to enhance their impact and dissemination.
- 10.2. Undertaking international reviews and QA procedures.

## Strategic priority 5. Strategic management

### VISION

We engender trust in the universities, government authorities and other stakeholders through the joint development of activities carried transparently and on the basis of the Agency's independence in technical matters, and through our contribution to a greater awareness in society of the university system in Catalonia.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

#### **11. Heightened recognition for the Agency**

- 11.1. Upkeep of current accreditations and improvements to QA results and outcomes.
- 11.2. Enhancement of the Agency's corporate social responsibility.

#### **12. Promotion of a more extensive and better dissemination of the Agency's activities and their results**

- 12.1. Definition and implementation of a Communications Plan adapted to the expectations of the main stakeholders and the kind of projects.

#### **13. We have a sufficient number of collaborators and experts of recognised standing who contribute added value to the Agency's activities and are satisfied being involved with AQU Catalunya**

- 13.1. Implementation and consolidation of an integrated human resources management system to attract and recruit, select, train, assess, secure the loyalty and guarantee the ability and value of collaborators and experts.
- 13.2. Increase in the participation of international collaborators and experts in the Agency's activities, particularly in institutional review procedures.

**14. Encouragement for students and graduates to participate in the quality enhancement of higher education and consolidate their involvement in the activities of AQU Catalunya**

- 14.1. Ensure that the needs and expectations of students are incorporated into QA procedures.
- 14.2. Promotion of the connection of students from Catalan universities with European student networks.
- 14.3. Gather feedback from graduates regarding their opinions on ways to improve and enhance the quality of higher education.

## Strategic priority 6. Internal Organisation

### VISION

We are an efficient, flexible and open organisation that is enhancement and outcomes-oriented, with a team of staff that is competent, creative and satisfied.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

#### **15. The strengthening and underpinning of project management, the quality management system and information security with sufficient resources**

- 15.1. Redefining of the design of projects with a more participative approach, and ensuring that sufficient human and economic resources are available.
- 15.2. Upkeep of the important role of technology and technological resources.
- 15.3. The simplification of bureaucratic procedures.
- 15.4. Improvements to the participative processes of meta-assessment and the gathering of information on internal and external user satisfaction.

#### **16. Improvements to, and the upgrading of, the structure and running of the organisation and internal communications**

- 16.1. Adaptation of the structure and activities according to requirements.
- 16.2. Definition and implementation of the criteria for participation in projects and activities.
- 16.3. Better internal communications.



**17. Higher levels of staff motivation, satisfaction and commitment**

17.1. Definition and implementation of the human resources policy.

17.2. Development of procedures to increase the level of staff satisfaction and motivation.

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