

STATEMENT BY THE AQU BOARD OF MANAGEMENT REGARDING THE EX ANTE ASSESSMENT OF BACHELOR AND MASTER'S DEGREES IN CATALONIA

The AQU Board of Management, consisting of the rectors and chairpersons of the Catalan universities' social councils, the rectors of private universities and renowned academics, **states that:**

AQU Catalunya is **the first quality assurance agency to have been set up in Spain**. It has reviewed the quality of university degrees since 1996 and, **since 2005, has undertaken the ex ante assessment of recognised postgraduate programmes..**

In 2000, it became the first quality assurance agency to receive ISO 9001 certification. It is a **founder** (2000) and **full member** (2008) of the **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education** (ENQA).

In 2008, it was **one of the first three agencies to be entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)**. This culminated the Agency's endeavours to comply with the requirements set by the Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Europe in various European institutional declarations (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Bergen Communiqué, 2005; and the London Communiqué, 2007). It also guaranteed application of the European standards in review and evaluation processes and, in accordance with these standards, facilitated mutual recognition with other recognised European agencies.

AQU Catalunya is thereby **an internationally recognised agency**, which carries out **review processes in accordance with international standards for quality assurance**, with **proven experience**, and it abides by the levels of **quality assurance** laid down by European standards.

It is laid down in legislation (Organic Law 4/2007, dated 12 April, which amended the Spanish Universities Act/LOU) that the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and the quality assurance bodies established by law in the regional Autonomous Communities in Spain, in accordance with the international standards for quality assurance, **shall establish mechanisms for cooperation and mutual recognition (...)**. Furthermore, it states that, "The Government, subject to a report by the General Conference on University Policy, shall regulate the conditions whereby **the universities must submit recognised degree programmes and their effective delivery for review and monitoring, together with the procedure for their accreditation**".

A restrictive interpretation is made of the abovementioned legislation by Royal Decree 1393/2007, dated 29 October, concerning the regulation of recognised university degree programmes, and exclusive attribution is given to the functions of the review of programmes of



study to ANECA, **leaving without effect the functions performed by AQU Catalunya since 2005**. In order to defend the jurisdiction of Catalonia over the review and assurance of the quality and excellence of university education, recognised under the Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia, the Catalan Government presented a positive conflict of competence to the Spanish State one year ago, which is still pending resolution.

In November 2008, the General Conference on University Policy and the Universities Council (Ministry of Science and Innovation) agreed to the signing of cooperation agreements between ANECA and such quality assurance agencies that are favourably reviewed in accordance with international standards, as is the case with AQU Catalunya, in order for them to take on the functions of ex ante assessment. Two months later, and in spite of reiterated objections by the Ministry's Commission for Universities and Research, **the signing of these agreements has still not taken place, the causes for which are unknown**.

The Board of Management understands that **AQU Catalunya is the agency responsible for carrying out the ex ante assessment of degree programmes given in Catalan universities** from the 2010-2011 academic year onwards. These review processes must be consistent with those applied in the rest of Spain although, in addition, they will need to incorporate the programming criteria adopted by the General Meeting of the Inter-university Council of Catalonia (November 2007), which guarantee, amongst other things, that graduates shall have a good knowledge of a third language and that they shall have undertaken outside placement and/or work experience.

Given the delay in the process of signing the agreements, which may impede AQU Catalunya from carrying out the ex ante assessment of degree programmes that will start in the 2010-2011 academic year, the **Board of Management will give its full support to the Catalan Government in its urgent demand to the Ministry of Science and Innovation** to put into effect the agreements by the General Conference on University Policy and the Universities Council in order for AQU Catalunya to adopt the function of the ex ante assessment of Bachelor and Master's degrees, until the positive conflict of competence that is under way is resolved.

Barcelona, 22 January 2009
