



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

GUIDE TO THE INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A tool for international academic mobility

October 2016



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aims of the guide

AQU Catalunya (the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency/Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya) is the primary instrument for promotion and assurance of quality in the university system in Catalonia. AQU Catalunya is entrusted with the review, accreditation and certification of quality in the universities and higher education institutions (study programmes, teaching staff, faculties and services) in Catalonia.

Based in Barcelona, AQU Catalunya is one of the founder agencies as well as a current full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). It was also one of the first agencies to be registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The Agency consequently complies with the ESG in all of its quality assurance and review activities and procedures.

In addition, AQU Catalunya is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), where it currently (since 2013) hosts the network's Secretariat, and of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). It was also the first European QA agency to be ISO standard certified.

In this setting with a substantial international bearing, the goal of the present guide is to serve as an instrument for facilitating international academic mobility and it is framed within the AQU Catalunya strategy of promoting mobility and academic cooperation on an international scale.

Indeed, the specific aim of the guide is to provide accreditation to those institutions that meet rigorous academic standards, in accordance with the characteristics of their setting, and which in international terms are reliable, trustworthy bodies for international academic mobility and cooperation, particularly in exchanges with institutions of the Catalan university system.

This document sets out the guidelines to be followed by teaching institutions that seek to secure international accreditation: for instance, the establishment of clear objectives concerning international mobility and cooperation; the existence of quality assurance and management mechanisms aligned to the aforementioned mobility and cooperation objectives; and the system used for the analysis of academic mobility and cooperation results. It likewise provides details of the assessment criteria, the accreditation results, the timetable and the disclosure of results.

1.2. Regulatory framework

Measurement of the quality of study programmes is a recurring issue in the sector of higher education. Frequently dealt with in all kinds of forums, numerous solutions have been put forward by experts. A recent trend however suggests that the concern for quality in higher education has transcended national borders and the focus is increasingly being put on the needs and

requirements of international stakeholders, be it students on academic mobility or the institutions that promote it.

For different reasons, most quality assurance (QA) procedures in the world are implemented on either a state or national basis, the fundamental aim being the consistency of government policy as regards the higher education sector. Nevertheless, the internationalisation of QA procedures has already occurred in certain countries, which has broadened the field of vision with an additional series of benchmarks.

The methodology being proposed by AQU Catalunya is not meant to replace national QA procedures, and its sole purpose is to serve as a complement that promotes diagnosis within a broader geographical frame of reference.



AQU Catalunya's methodology is based on the ESG (ENQA's standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education) and also incorporates specifications from other contexts that facilitate the process of calculating an institution's position as regards academic exchange at international level. Trustworthiness and reliability as regards this particular aspect are considered to be an important added value for an institution.

Quality assurance by AQU Catalunya is of an institutional nature with priority being given to HEI governance. This clearly requires that institutions under review already have consolidated QA procedures in place for their study programmes. This approach complies with the objectives of safeguarding university autonomy, respect for the national model that applies to an education institution, and priority being given to the responsibility of HEIs themselves as far as quality is concerned.

This approach to review and evaluation at institutional level is more closely aligned with the recognition of quality at international level. One important consideration is that this same approach undertaken at programme level would, in the long term, lead to an increase in the uncertainty of quality assurance due to the variability of provision that constantly seeks to adapt to new academic and professional demands and requirements; it would also be more difficult to deal with the large number of different regulations covering the international recognition of university degrees existing in each country.

2. ORGANISATION AND PLANNING OF THE ASSESSMENT

2.1. Assessment committees

One aspect that helps to ensure the validity, reliability and usefulness of external assessment processes is the action performed by external experts (peer reviews). Peer reviews are based on the academic, scientific and technical guidance afforded by experts as a distinguishing feature. They are also based on a direct study and observation of the reality to be assessed, which makes it possible to clarify the information examined and place it in context; therefore, it may be stated that the approach to the assessment is peer-based.

The selection of experts is a procedure that AQU Catalunya keeps open on a permanent basis via a mechanism where experts may register with the Agency's expert panel via the website http://www.aqu.cat/experts/banc_avaluadors_en.html.

2.1.1. External assessment committees (CAE)

The review process relies on an external assessment committee (CAE, from the Catalan) which undertakes a visit to the institution. It is incumbent upon said body to draft a report on the visit which will form a decisive instrument in relation to the resolution ultimately issued by the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee (CAIP, from the Catalan).

The CAE shall be formed by at least four people with the following profiles:

1. Academic expert
 - At least one academic representative of acknowledged standing with expertise in the European Higher Education Area and experience with internal quality assurance systems.
 - He/she shall have knowledge and experience in assessment of university study programmes. Previous contribution to assessment projects in conjunction with AQU Catalunya and/or other national or international agencies will be an advantage.
 - As a general rule, the committee should be chaired by the academic person with the greatest seniority, provided said individual has held a position of authority on a governing body.
2. Professional expert
 - A person with professional experience linked to the qualifications under assessment.
 - As a general rule, the professional shall be from the home country of the institution assessed.
3. Student

- An undergraduate or postgraduate student, preferably a current or former member of HEI governing bodies.
- As a general rule, the student shall belong to the same Higher Education System as the institution assessed.

4. Methodology expert

At least one person with specific expertise in quality assessment methodologies for university systems. These people will preferably be technical staff of a quality agency or a technical quality unit at a university outside Catalonia, with experience of quality assurance systems and quality assessment of qualifications, institutions or teaching staff.

Members of CAEs are to be appointed by the CAIP chairperson. The individuals appointed must ensure that independence, objectivity, absence of conflicts of interests, ethical commitment and confidentiality form the pillars of their work. Accordingly, committee members should be external to the institution they are assessing and have no association with it whatsoever.

To ensure the necessary transparency, the composition of CAEs will be published on the AQU Catalunya website.

2.1.2. The Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee (CAIP)

Among other functions, it shall be incumbent on the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee (CAIP, from the Catalan) to ratify the external assessment report drawn up by the CAE.

The CAIP shall be formed by the following members:

- a) A chairperson.
- b) No more than six people of acknowledged academic or professional standing from the university community of Catalonia.
- c) No more than six people of acknowledged academic or professional standing from the international university community.
- d) A secretary, who must be an individual employed by AQU Catalunya.

To ensure the necessary transparency, the composition of the CAIP and the CVs of its members will be published on the AQU Catalunya website.

2.1.3. The Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee is responsible for addressing all appeals lodged on the context of the foreign institution assessment procedure. In order to resolve appeals, the committee shall use reports prepared by experts in the field or fields covered by the degree programmes in relation to which the appeal is lodged, preferably outside the Catalan university system.

2.2. Assessment procedure

2.2.1. Terms of eligibility for AQU Catalunya assessment procedures

QA procedures by AQU Catalunya involving assessment are only available to higher education institutions that meet rigorous academic standards in accordance with the characteristics of their setting, provided they are reliable and trustworthy as a partner institution for cooperation and academic mobility at international level.

The assessment process begins at the request of the university concerned. For institutions applying for international review by AQU Catalunya, particular attention will be paid to the following:

- a) That the institution has informed the corresponding national QA agency, where one exists, of its request for an international review by AQU Catalunya.
- b) The award of national accreditations by the corresponding national QA agency, in cases where one exists.

These recommendations are given to facilitate cooperation between AQU Catalunya and national QA agencies, with the understanding that QA and assessment procedures by AQU Catalunya shall neither compete with nor supersede national QA and review procedures, but serve as a complement and added value to the same.

2.2.2. The assessment procedure

The procedure for international quality assessment of higher education comprises the following key stages:

- 1) **Application for participation.** The HEI must formally submit an application for participation.
- 2) **Preparation of the cooperation agreement.** AQU Catalunya and the applicant institution shall draw up the cooperation agreement that must be signed prior to embarking on the assessment process.
- 3) **Preparation of the self-assessment report.** The applicant institution shall prepare a self-assessment report in line with the AQU Catalunya assessment protocol detailed herein.
- 4) **Analysis of the self-assessment report.** The CAIP shall examine the self-assessment report in order to issue the non-public diagnosis report that will be submitted to the applicant institution.

- a. To identify the extent to which the applicant institution is ready to meet the quality criteria established by AQU Catalunya.
 - b. To identify actions for improvement prior to the visit procedure.
 - c. To stop the institution from embarking on a premature visit procedure and make sure the investment in the assessment procedure is justified in view of the likelihood of a favourable result being achieved.
- 5) **Planning the visit.** Once a positive report has been issued by the CAIP, AQU Catalunya will coordinate with the applicant institution to set the dates for the visit.
 - 6) **Assessment.** The assessment entails the analysis of all documentation submitted by the CAE, before the actual visit.
 - 7) **The actual visit.** The primary goal of this stage is to gain an acquaintance *in situ* of the institution's readiness for international academic exchange. The evidence provided will be compared or validated, any discrepancies or conflicts will be identified and, if applicable, further evidence will be obtained in order to review areas not envisaged in the documentation provided.

It is expected that interviews will be organised with internal groups (academic and administrative directors, teaching staff and students) and external groups (graduates, representatives from the professional sector and employers).

The CAE will have the opportunity to visit the facilities at the institution, in particular library services, tutorial rooms, study rooms, etc., which will give them a direct idea of the institution and its resources.

The duration of the visit will depend on the size of the institution and the study programmes involved.

- 8) **Preliminary external assessment report.** Within a period of four weeks at the most, the CAE chairperson shall submit the committee's report to AQU Catalunya.

AQU Catalunya may refuse to issue the report if during the visit major discrepancies (such as misrepresentation of data and evidence) are identified between the information set out in the self-assessment report and the reality observed.

- 9) **Approval of the preliminary external assessment report.** The CAIP shall issue a preliminary external assessment report which shall be primarily based on the evidence gleaned from the report on the visit issued by the CAE. Subsequently, the result shall be reported to the institution.

Within a period of approximately twenty days, the institution may submit any statements it deems pertinent for the preliminary report for the CAE and the CAIP to take into consideration.

- 10) **Final report.** Within a period of approximately twenty days, subject to an examination of the remarks made on the report by the institution, the CAE shall draw up and issue a definitive external assessment report.

The CAIP will receive the definitive external assessment report and give ratification. The result of the report will be specified as favourable or unfavourable, as described in section 4.1 of this guide.

- 11) **Disclosure of the result.** Once the final report has been issued, the result will be notified to the competent department for universities, the institution and the competent organisation for quality in the institution's home country, if any.

- 12) **Register.** AQU Catalunya will create a specific public register of the institutions that have obtained a favourable assessment for international quality in higher education, which will be made available via its website.

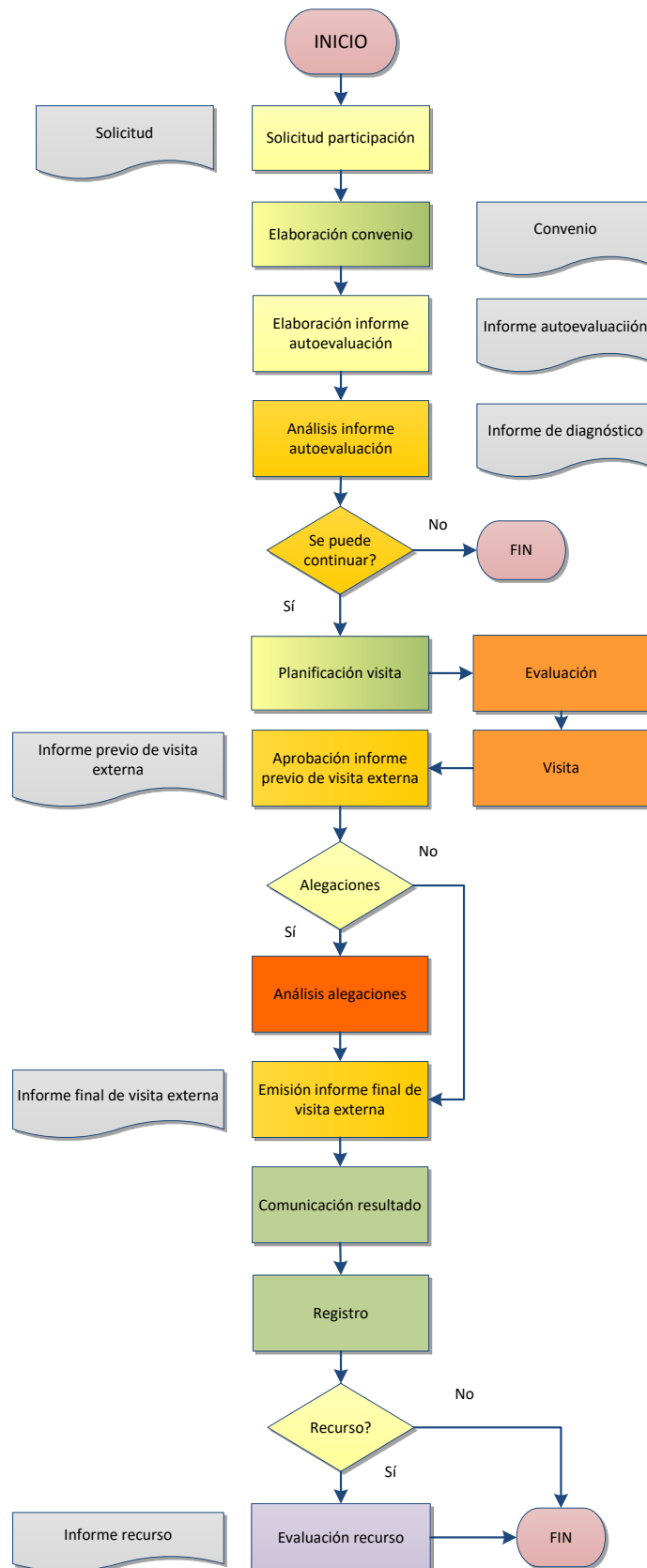
- 13) **The appeal procedure.** An appeal may be lodged to AQU Catalunya Appeals Committee in objection to reports issued by the CAIP.

The Appeals Committee must issue a resolution within a period of no more than 3 months. A resolution issued in relation to the appeal will put an end to administrative proceedings. If any change needs to be made to the final report issued owing to the appeal, the report will be replaced and the new one recorded.

AQU Catalunya shall serve notice of the outcome of the appeal to the institution and the national quality assurance agency, if any.

An organisational chart of the procedure for assessing international quality is set out below:

- Institución
- AQU Catalunya
- CEE
- CAIP
- C. Apelaciones



3. DIMENSIONS AND DESCRIPTORS OF THE ASSESSMENT

This guide has been envisaged for assessing university institutions outside Catalonia. It includes the assessment experience developed by the Catalan agency in universities from Catalonia, Europe and other continents.

It is meant for use by internal staff in the institution under review for the self-assessment, as well as external reviewers working for AQU Catalunya in the external assessment.

The accreditation procedure is carried out in accordance with the following:

- a) The external reviewers rate and score each descriptor on a consensus basis after having checked the evidence provided by the institution for each descriptor in the self-assessment report, and following the corresponding focus groups with both the internal and external groups. In the focus groups, care is to be taken in particular to check the descriptors that in particular need to be dealt with in the focus groups
- b) In addition to the quantitative assessment, a qualitative assessment is also to be made of each chapter of descriptors, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses, together with a due assessment of the evidence provided.
- c) Each chapter contains a series of indicators that are considered to be critical as regards the quality of an institution of higher learning. A score of at least 3 is necessary for these indicators in order for the level of quality in the institution to be deemed sufficient. These descriptors appear *in italics* in the text of the protocol
- d) The external reviewers will have the opportunity to visit the facilities at the institution, in particular the library services, tutorial rooms, study rooms, etc., which will give them a direct idea of the institution and its resources.

In addition to the indicators in the guide, the institution may submit examples of good practices, which will be considered in the qualitative reports in the corresponding chapter.

3.1. Dimensions and descriptors

3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
1.1. The corresponding organisational unit (faculty, school, department, etc.) produces and formally approves specifications for all degree courses, subjects and study programmes.(*)					
1.2. Intended learning outcomes are stated in the programme specification (in the form of professional or equivalent skills).					
1.3. Different modes of delivery (e.g. classroom-based, semi-distance learning, e-learning, etc.) are available to cover different groups and needs.(*)					
1.4. Regular periodic reviews of programmes that include monitoring of the progress and achievements of students, consultation with relevant stakeholders, enhancement proposals, etc.(*)					
1.5. A periodic review is carried out of programme curricula by a committee of experts.					
1.6. Teaching staff participate in QA (improvement and enhancement) procedures.					
1.7. Students participate in QA (improvement and enhancement) procedures.(*)					
1.8. Regular feedback on programmes and awards from graduates and employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations.(*)					
1.9. Measures are taken to assist students with needs for foundation or preparatory study.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.2. Teaching staff

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
2.1. There are assurances that teachers have a full knowledge and understanding of subjects at the level at which they are teaching.(*)					
2.2. Teachers have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching and the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts.(*)					
2.3. The possibility exists for teaching staff from other institutions to teach in the institution.					
2.4. Staff recruitment and appointment procedures make certain that all new staff have at least the necessary minimum level of competence.(*)					
2.5. There is a rigorous and reliable system for the assessment of teaching staff.(*)					
2.6. Teaching staff are given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity.(*)					
2.7. Teachers with poor performance ratings are provided with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level.(*)					
2.8. There are means to remove teachers with poor performance ratings from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective.(*)					
2.9. There is recognition of the quality of work by staff who demonstrate particular excellence, expertise and dedication.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

<p>Evidence submitted</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.3. Learning resources

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
3.1. A variety of the latest learning resources are made available to students.(*)					
3.2. Students receive assistance from a tutor who guides and helps them in their studies.(*)					
3.3. A system is in place to assess the suitability of the human and physical resources available to students.(*)					
3.4. Teachers have a variety of physical and functional resources for teaching and the preparation of teaching.					
3.5. There is a functioning virtual campus for teachers and students that is easy to use.					
3.6. Laboratory and workshop facilities are appropriate to the courses that are taught and run.					
3.7. Classrooms are appropriate for teaching activities.					
3.8. Suitable rooms and facilities are available to teachers and students for group meetings.					
3.9. A system is in place to inform students of available resources and their use.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

<p>Evidence submitted</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.4. Learning assessment

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
4.1. Criteria for learning assessment are linked to the intended learning outcomes and skills (competences) of courses and subjects.(*)					
4.2. Qualifications criteria are clearly formulated.(*)					
4.3. The award of all qualifications relies on the judgment of more than one examiner.(*)					
4.4. Systematic monitoring is made of student progress and achievements in order to establish guidelines to help students who do not pass the corresponding examinations.(*)					
4.5. There are rules to cover any possible incident in assessment (absence, sickness, etc.).(*)					
4.6. Student assessments have clear and published criteria for marking.(*)					
4.7. Students are able to check examinations and qualifications.					
4.8. There is recognition of high-achieving students.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.5. Information

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
The institution has a system to gather objective information on:					
5.1. General academic results and outcomes(*)					
5.2. Graduates and the labour market(*)					
5.3. The profile of students(*)					
5.4. The opinions of teaching staff					
5.5. The opinions of students(*)					
5.6. The opinions of non-teaching staff					
5.7. The institution's status as regards similar institutions(*)					
5.8. The publication of the overall results and outcomes of the faculty/school/department(*)					
5.9. The existence of a clear and up-to-date information system (website) on the institution and academic provision in the faculty/school/department					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.6. The institution’s relations with the wider community and society in general

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
6.1. The institution has links with non-university social organisations.					
6.2. The institution has links with academic and cultural bodies and associations at national and international level.					
6.3. The institution has links with employers of its graduates.					
6.4. There is a university careers and employment service that offers its services to students and graduates.					
6.5. The institution participates in social activities: cultural, sports, care for the disadvantaged, etc.					
6.6. Active efforts are made to ensure cultural and ethnic equity.					
6.7. Active efforts are made to ensure gender equity.					
6.8. Active efforts are made in the institution to protect the environment: energy saving, waste management, etc.					
6.9. Cultural diversity is respected in a way that is consistent with the institution’s mission.					
6.10. The institution offers lifelong learning courses and programmes.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

<p>Evidence submitted</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.7. The institution's relations with other institutions for academic exchange

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
7.1. The institution has academic exchange programmes for students and teachers with similar institutions at national level.					
7.2. The institution has exchange programmes for students and teachers with similar institutions at international level.					
7.3. The institution has an office that deals with information on and organisation of student exchanges.(*)					
7.4. The outcomes of student exchange are studied and analysed.					
7.5. There is mutual recognition of qualifications with foreign universities to encourage student exchange.					
7.6. The institution offers grants and/or information on international grants is provided to students and their use encouraged.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.8. Research

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
8.1. The institution promotes research without draining resources from education.					
8.2. There is institutional recognition of the research that is carried out.					
8.3. The institution participates in joint research projects and agreements with other institutions, networks, etc.					
8.4. Articles are published in leading international journals.					
8.5. Doctorate (PhD) studies are offered in the institution.					
8.6. The proportion of teaching staff who are doctorate holders is appropriate to the institution's academic requirements.					
8.7. Teaching staff include researchers who are recognised at both national and international level.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.1.9. Governance

DESCRIPTORS

	0	1	2	3	4
9.1. Access to the institution's system of governance is public and transparent.					
9.2. Individuals in managerial positions are regularly accountable for their work and activities.					
9.3. There is short and mid-term planning for management teams.					
9.4. Students have easy access to administrative information.					
9.5. Information on the institution's structure of governance is available and up-to-date.					
9.6. Intra-institutional communication between the institution's authorities and stakeholders is fast and smooth.					
9.7. The role of administration and services staff in the governance of the institution is recognised.					

Qualitative assessment of the chapter:

Evidence submitted

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Fundamental descriptors

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Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Overall assessment of the chapter

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3.2. Evidence for the descriptors

A list of the evidence submitted for each proposed descriptor is given below. This is not an exclusive list, and the institution may provide further evidence.

3.2.1. Quality of programmes and awards

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>1.1. Programme specifications (for degrees, programmes and courses) are produced by the corresponding organisational unit (faculty, school, department, etc.).(*)</p> <p>1.2. Intended learning outcomes are stated in the programme specification (in the form of professional or equivalent skills).</p> <p>1.3. Different modes of delivery (e.g. classroom-based, semi-distance learning, e-learning, etc.) are available to cover different groups and needs(*).</p> <p>1.4. Regular periodic reviews of programmes that include monitoring of the progress and achievements of students, consultation with relevant stakeholders, enhancement proposals, etc. (*)</p> <p>1.5. A periodic review is carried out of programme curricula by a committee of experts.</p>	<p>1.1 and 1.2. Official supporting documents and publications referring to the planning of degrees, programmes and courses, as well as the units and individuals in charge.</p> <p>1.3. Official guides and prospectuses on courses and programmes; the institution's website.</p> <p>1.4 and 1.5. Internal rules and regulations and proceedings of the corresponding committee meetings, together with the composition of the committees and agreements.</p>

<p>1.6. Teaching staff participate in QA (improvement and enhancement) procedures.</p> <p>1.7. Students participate in QA (improvement and enhancement) procedures.(*)</p> <p>1.8. Regular feedback on programmes and awards from graduates and employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations.(*)</p> <p>1.9. Measures are taken to assist students with needs for foundation or preparatory study.</p>	<p>1.6 and 1.7. Supporting documentation for the enhancement plan, with timelines and target dates, actions to be carried out, etc., including the proceedings of meetings with teaching staff and students.</p> <p>1.8. Proceedings dealing with the revision of courses with the participation of graduates and employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations.</p> <p>1.9. Programme drawn up for this purpose, together with the outcomes.</p>
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3.2.2. Teaching staff

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>2.1. There are assurances that teachers have a full knowledge and understanding of subjects at the level at which they are teaching.(*)</p> <p>2.2. Teachers have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching and the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts.(*)</p> <p>2.3. The possibility exists for teaching staff from other institutions to teach in the institution.</p> <p>2.4. Staff recruitment and appointment procedures make certain that all new staff have the necessary minimum level of competence.(*)</p> <p>2.5. There is a rigorous and reliable system for the assessment of teaching staff.(*)</p> <p>2.6. Teaching staff are given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity.(*)</p> <p>2.7. Teachers with poor performance ratings are provided with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level.(*)</p> <p>2.8. There are means to remove teachers with poor performance ratings from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective.(*)</p> <p>2.9. There is recognition of the quality of work by staff who demonstrate particular excellence, expertise and dedication.</p>	<p>2.1 to 2.4. Documents on the system of staff recruitment and appointment, eligibility requirements, the committees involved, etc.</p> <p>2.5. The institution's statutes, documentation on the system of assessment, questionnaires used, composition of any committees, etc.</p> <p>2.6 to 2.9. Organisational structure of the institution with the committees responsible for teaching assessment, anonymous examples of reports applicable to teachers with poor performance ratings, accreditation of the non-renewal of contracts due to poor performance, records of awards, prizes and bonuses, etc.</p>

3.2.3. Learning resources

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>3.1. A variety of the latest learning resources are made available to students.(*)</p> <p>3.2. Students receive assistance from a tutor who guides and helps them in their studies.(*)</p> <p>3.3. A system is in place to assess the suitability of the human and physical resources available to students.(*)</p> <p>3.4. Teachers have a variety of physical and functional resources for teaching and the preparation of teaching.</p> <p>3.5. There is a functioning virtual campus for teachers and students that is easy to use.</p> <p>3.6. Laboratory and workshop facilities are appropriate to the courses that are taught and run.</p> <p>3.7. Classrooms are appropriate for teaching activities.</p> <p>3.8. Suitable rooms and facilities are available to teachers and students for group meetings.</p> <p>3.9. Students are informed of available resources and their use.</p>	<p>3.1 and 3.4. Institutional report on the institution's physical resources.</p> <p>3.2. Existing information in the institution's official guide and in the report drawn up for this purpose.</p> <p>3.3. Documentation produced by the Institution with regard to this, with the proceedings and minutes of the corresponding committees.</p> <p>3.5. The possibility of accessing and entering the online campus and checking that it works properly and everything is in place.</p> <p>3.6. Supporting documentation provided by the institution.</p> <p>3.7 and 3.8. The possibility of visiting the institution's classrooms, laboratories and other facilities.</p> <p>3.9. Rules and documentation on this matter.</p>

3.2.4. Learning assessment

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>4.1. Criteria for learning assessment are linked to the intended learning outcomes and skills (competences) of courses and subjects.(*)</p> <p>4.2. Qualifications criteria are clearly formulated.(*)</p> <p>4.3. The award of all qualifications relies on the judgment of more than one examiner.(*)</p> <p>4.4. Systematic monitoring is made of student progress and achievements in order to establish guidelines to help students who do not pass the corresponding examinations.(*)</p> <p>4.5. There are rules to cover any possible incident in assessment (absence, sickness, etc.).(*)</p> <p>4.6. Student assessments have clear and published criteria for marking.(*)</p> <p>4.7. Students are able to check examinations and qualifications.</p> <p>4.8. There is recognition of high-achieving students.</p>	<p>4.1 and 4.2. Programme specifications including all details at course/subject level.</p> <p>4.3 to 4.7. The institution's supporting documentation on the system of assessment, student handbook, etc.</p> <p>4.8. The institution's supporting documentation, records of awards and prizes, etc.</p>

3.2.5. Information

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>The institution has a system to gather objective information on:</p> <p>5.1. General academic results and outcomes(*)</p> <p>5.2. Graduates and the labour market(*)</p> <p>5.3. The student profile(*)</p> <p>5.4. The opinions of teaching staff</p> <p>5.5. The opinions of students(*)</p> <p>5.6. The opinions of non-teaching staff</p> <p>5.7. The institution's status as regards similar institutions(*)</p> <p>5.8. Publication of the overall results and outcomes of the faculty/school/department(*)</p> <p>5.9. The existence of a clear and up-to-date information system (website) on the institution and academic provision in the faculty/school/department</p>	<p>5.1 to 5.3. Official publications on these matters produced by the institution</p> <p>5.4 to 5.6. Institutional report on the system of participation and the gathering of relevant data</p> <p>5.7. Official publications produced by the university and/or government authorities</p> <p>5.8. The institution's official publications; the institution's website</p> <p>5.9. Possibility of entering the institution's website without password restrictions</p>

3.2.6. The institution's relations with the wider community and society in general

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>6.1. The institution has links with non-university social organisations.</p> <p>6.2. The institution has links with academic and cultural bodies and associations at national and international level.</p> <p>6.3. The institution has links with stakeholders (employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations) that employ its graduates.</p> <p>6.4. There is a university careers and employment service that offers its services to students and graduates.</p> <p>6.5. The institution participates in social activities (cultural, sports, care for the disadvantaged, etc.).</p> <p>6.6. Active efforts are made to ensure cultural and ethnic equity.</p> <p>6.7. Active efforts are made to ensure gender equity.</p> <p>6.8. Active efforts are made in the institution to protect the environment: energy saving, waste management, etc.</p> <p>6.9. Cultural diversity is respected in a way that is consistent with the institution's mission.</p> <p>6.10. The institution offers lifelong learning courses and programmes.</p>	<p>6.1 to 6.3. Agreements entered into with organisations and institutions.</p> <p>6.4. Existing information and the possibility of visiting the internal service/office in charge.</p> <p>6.5. The institution's activities report (annual report).</p> <p>6.6 to 6.9. Supporting documentation for existing institutional agreements.</p> <p>6.10. The institution's activities report (annual report); documentation on the courses and programmes concerned.</p>

3.2.7. The institution's relations with other institutions for academic exchange

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>7.1. The institution has academic exchange programmes for students and teachers with similar institutions at national level.</p> <p>7.2. The institution has exchange programmes for students and teachers with similar institutions at international level.</p> <p>7.3. The institution has an office that deals with information on and organisation of student exchanges.(*)</p> <p>7.4. The outcomes of student exchange are studied and analysed.</p> <p>7.5. There is mutual recognition of qualifications with foreign universities to encourage student exchange.</p> <p>7.6. The institution offers grants and/or information is available on international grants and students are encouraged to apply for grant funding.</p>	<p>7.1 and 7.2. Agreements entered into with organisations and institutions.</p> <p>7.3. The institution's organisational structure and website.</p> <p>7.4 to 7.6. Corresponding publications and official information (agreements, etc.); report on mobility in previous years.</p>

3.2.8. Research

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>8.1. The institution promotes research without draining resources from education.</p> <p>8.2. There is institutional recognition of the research that is carried out.</p> <p>8.3. The institution participates in joint research projects and agreements with other institutions, networks, etc.</p> <p>8.4. Articles are published in leading international journals.</p> <p>8.5. Doctorate (PhD) studies are offered in the institution.</p> <p>8.6. The proportion of teaching staff who are doctorate holders is appropriate to the institution's academic requirements.</p> <p>8.7. Teaching staff include researchers who are recognised at both national and international level.</p>	<p>8.1 and 8.2. Supporting documentation on the corresponding agreements entered into by the institution.</p> <p>8.3 and 8.4. Publication of research work undertaken; agreements entered into with other institutions.</p> <p>8.5. Documentation on doctoral programmes; information on the website.</p> <p>8.6 and 8.7. Background documentation on the institution; the institution's official report.</p>

3.2.9. Governance

DESCRIPTORS	EVIDENCE
<p>9.1. Access to the institution's system of governance is public and transparent.</p> <p>9.2. Individuals in managerial positions are regularly accountable for their work and activities.</p> <p>9.3. There is short and mid-term planning for management teams.</p> <p>9.4. Students have easy access to administrative information.</p> <p>9.5. Information on the institution's structure of governance is available and up-to-date.</p> <p>9.6. Intra-institutional communication between the institution's authorities and stakeholders is fast and smooth.</p> <p>9.7. The role of administration and services staff in the governance of the institution is recognised.</p>	<p>9.1 to 9.7. Statutes of either the university and/or the institution.</p> <p>9.2 and 9.3. Publications and reports by the institution's bodies of governance: dean's office, management of the faculty/school/ department, etc.</p> <p>9.4 to 9.6. The institution's website and publications with administrative instructions.</p> <p>9.7. Statutes of the university and the faculty/school/department.</p>

3.3. Descriptors to be assessed in the focus groups

DESCRIPTORS	FOCUS GROUPS					
	GOVERNANCE	DEPT. MGTM.	TEACHING STAFF	STUDENTS	ADMIN. AND SERVICE STAFF	EX ALUMNI AND SOCIAL PARTNERS
1.1	+	+	+	+		
1.2	+	+	+			
1.3	+			+		
1.4	+	+	+	+		
1.5	+	+	+			
1.6	+	+	+			
1.7	+	+		+		
1.8	+					+
1.9	+			+		
2.1	+	+	+	+		
2.2		+	+	+		
2.3	+	+	+			
2.4	+	+	+			
2.5	+	+	+	+		
2.6	+	+	+			
2.7	+	+	+			
2.8	+	+		+		
2.9	+	+	+			
	+	+	+			

3.1	+	+		+	+	
3.2	+	+	+	+		
3.3	+					
3.4		+	+			
3.5	+		+	+		
3.6	+		+	+	+	
3.7			+	+		
3.8			+	+		
3.9	+	+		+		
4.1		+	+	+		
4.2		+	+	+		
4.3		+	+			
4.4		+	+	+		
4.5	+	+	+	+		
4.6		+	+	+		
4.7	+	+	+	+		
4.8	+			+		
5.1	+					
5.2	+					
5.3	+					
5.4	+	+	+			
5.5	+	+		+		
5.6	+				+	
5.7	+					

5.8	+					
5.9	+			+		
6.1	+	+				
6.2	+	+				
6.3	+					+
6.4	+			+		
6.5	+					
6.6	+	+	+	+	+	
6.7	+	+			+	
6.8	+	+	+	+	+	
6.9	+		+	+	+	
6.10	+					+
7.1	+	+	+			
7.2	+	+	+			
7.3	+	+	+			
7.4	+	+	+			
7.5	+	+				
7.6	+	+				
	+	+				
8.1	+	+				
8.2	+	+				
8.3	+	+	+			
8.4	+	+		+	+	
8.5	+	+	+	+	+	+
8.6	+	+	+	+	+	
8.7	+	+			+	

9.1	+	+	+			
9.2	+	+	+			
9.3	+	+	+		+	
9.4	+	+		+	+	
9.5	+	+	+	+	+	+
9.6	+	+	+		+	
9.7	+	+			+	

4. ASSESSMENT RESULT

4.1. Final report

The result of the report will be specified as **favourable** or **unfavourable**.

The report must at least incorporate the following information:

- 1) Quality of programmes and awards
- 2) Teaching staff
- 3) Learning resources
- 4) Learning assessment
- 5) Information
- 6) The institution's relations with the wider community and society in general
- 7) The institution's relations with other institutions for academic exchange
- 8) Research
- 9) Governance

Each chapter consists of a series of specific descriptors, totalling seventy-five all together, that include all of the European standards for internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, which are indicated with an asterisk (*), together with others that are considered to be important in general for quality in an institution of higher learning.

The assessment of each descriptor is made according to the following 5-point scale:

- 1) Non-compliance with the descriptor.
- 2) Low-level compliance with the descriptor.
- 3) Moderate-level compliance with the descriptor.
- 4) High-level compliance with the descriptor.
- 5) Very high-level compliance with the descriptor.

The highest score for the quantitative assessment is 300 points, with a minimum acceptable level for accreditation of 175 points. An institution is awarded accreditation with a high level of quality if it obtains between 190 and 240 points, whereas the level of quality with a score of between 240 and 300 points is considered to be that of, or close to, excellence.

External assessors shall conclude with an overall report taking into account all aspects defined in the accreditation procedure. The report shall incorporate a proposal for the improvement of areas with scope for enhancement, regardless of whether or not accreditation may be awarded.

The final assessment report shall place emphasis on indicators deemed basic or fundamental to the accreditation, although indicators with scope for improvement shall also be mentioned.

AQU Catalunya shall send the external visit report to the institution and the national quality assurance agency, if any.

The external visit report shall be published on AQU Catalunya's review reports portal (<http://estudis.aqu.cat/informes>).

4.2. Hallmarks and certificates

If a favourable assessment report is issued, AQU Catalunya will issue a quality hallmark ("Teaching institution with international accreditation") with its own unique number and the respective certificate, each with their own unique number. The hallmark shall be valid for a period of five years.



The terms of use are specified in the *AQU Catalunya quality hallmarks and terms of use thereof* document (*Segells de qualitat d'AQU Catalunya i condicions per al seu ús*, AQU, 2014), approved by the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya.

These hallmarks will be published on the University Study Programmes of Catalonia (EUC) website <http://estudis.aqu.cat>.

4.3. Effects of the assessment

The international quality assessment of higher education makes it possible to establish which institutions meet rigorous academic standards, in accordance with the characteristics of their setting, whilst also being internationally reliable, trustworthy bodies for international academic mobility and cooperation.

5. FOLLOW-UP AND CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

As clearly detailed in the pertinent guidelines relating to the standard for implementing assessment processes (ESG 2.3) (ENQA, 2015):

“External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.”

In keeping with this assumption, and taking into consideration the outcome of the external assessment, the goal of AQU Catalunya should be to ensure that the institution swiftly addresses areas with scope for improvement and that a spirit of accomplishment is encouraged.

With this approach in mind, throughout the effective period of the authorisation the institution shall be responsible for performing follow-ups and continual improvement of study programmes, pursuant to its own internal quality assurance system. In this respect, AQU Catalunya may request follow-up reports in order to review the extent to which measures defined previously have been implemented.

In any event, the international quality assessment will be valid for a period of five years, whereupon the institution will need to re-apply to AQU Catalunya for an assessment.



6. REFERENCES

Organic Act 6/2001, of 21 December, on Universities. <http://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2001-24515>

Act 15/2015, of 21 July, on Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya. <http://portaldogc.gencat.cat/utillsEADOP/AppJava/PdfProviderServlet?versionId=1435962&type=01>

ENQA (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_24427439_1.pdf

AQU Catalunya (2014). *Segells de qualitat d'AQU Catalunya i condicions per al seu ús*.



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