



Agència  
per a la Qualitat  
del Sistema Universitari  
de Catalunya

La qualitat,  
garantia de millora.

La calidad,  
garantía de mejora.

Quality, the assurance  
of improvement.



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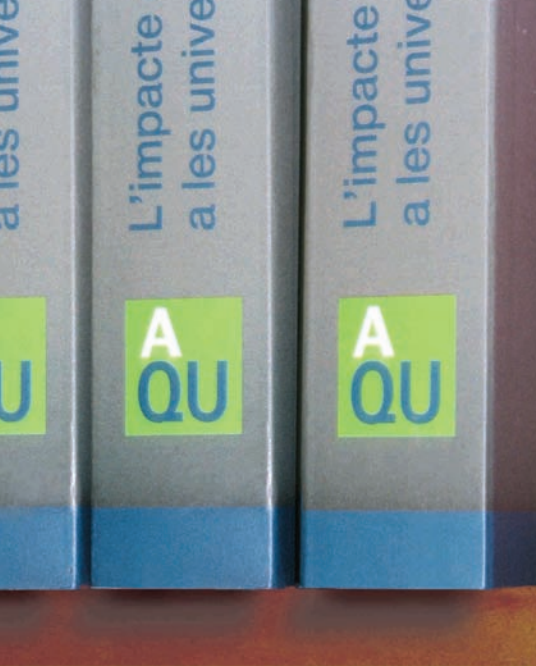
# Introduction

With the rapid development of the university systems during the 1980s, and the new context characterised by the change of technological model, the internationalisation of societies and the growing importance of the knowledge factor in the workings of the economy, it became necessary during the middle of the nineties to establish processes for the quality assurance and improvement of the university system in Catalonia in harmony with other European countries.

The *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya* consortium was accordingly established by the Autonomous Government of Catalonia and the public (state funded) universities in Catalonia in 1996, which subsequently acquired new attributions as a result of the Catalan Universities Act (LUC) passed in 2003 and changed its name to AQU Catalunya (*Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya*).

As a result of the endeavours of the Catalan Government's Ministry of Universities, Research and the Information Society, the Catalan universities and AQU Catalunya, the culture of quality is now soundly disseminated in the Catalan university system as a whole. This dossier serves as an introduction to AQU Catalunya and describes the layout of its structure and values that are upheld, together with the series of activities it undertakes to consolidate quality assurance and improvement in the Catalan universities.





# History

The *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya* was legally established as a consortium between the Autonomous Government of Catalonia and the Catalan public universities on 26 September 1996, with the aim to promote the improvement of quality in the Catalan university system through its main instrument of the institutional assessment of quality, focused mainly on university degrees standards. The course of development of the consortium (1996-2003) was marked by the following stages:

1996-1997

Founding and establishment as a consortium.

1998-1999

Consolidation of assessment activities, growth and development of its internal organisation, and initial connections abroad, especially within the sphere of the European Union.

2000-2001

Full consolidation of the organisation, external recognition of the activities carried out, prioritisation of methodological innovation, and the setting in place of the foundations for its future scope of influence with approval of the 2001-2007 Plan of Action for the improvement of the Catalan university system.

2002-2003

Action plans developed. A new entity established with more competencies.

During its seven years of activity, the activity of the original consortium centred on assessing recognised degree qualifications at the public universities (a total of 251), the results of which were published in the annual reports. It organised seminars, meetings and workshops for thought and discussion in conjunction with the Catalan universities, it published six General Frameworks dossiers on, best practices put into effect by the universities and recommendations made by experts, and it produced, among other publications, *Educació superior i treball a Catalunya* (Higher Education and Employment in Catalonia), which included the results of the study on job placement among graduates of the Catalan public universities.

Law 1/2003 of February on the Universities in Catalonia (the Catalan Universities Act) converted the consortium into a Catalan government-run enterprise, which changed its name to AQU Catalunya (*Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya*). While upholding the legacy of the former Agency, AQU Catalunya has since gone on to extend membership of the consortium to include, among others, representatives of the private universities, and to develop new competencies in the fields of quality assessment and teaching staff and research assessment.

# Purpose and functions

The purpose of AQU Catalunya is to assess, accredit and certify university and higher education in Catalonia. Pursuant to the Catalan Universities Act (LUC), the functions of AQU Catalunya are as follows:

- Assessment of courses leading to recognised and non-recognised degree qualifications awarded by universities and institutions of higher education.
- Certification of the quality of university education, management and activities.
- Accreditation of courses within the framework of the European Area of Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- Assessment of educational institutions in Catalonia that offer courses leading to higher degrees awarded by foreign awarding bodies.
- Accreditation of the systems and procedures for the quality assessment of universities, including those involving the teaching function of faculty (teaching staff).
- Issuing of the pertinent reports for the recruitment of tenure-track lecturers and collaborating lecturers.
- Issuing of research and advanced research accreditations.
- Evaluation of the activities of researchers and assessment of the individual research merits of tenured and non-tenured teaching and research staff, for the allocation of salary bonuses, as laid down in Sections 55 and 69 of Organic Law 6/2001 on Universities, of 21st December.
- Evaluation of the research activity of teaching and research staff of private universities.
- Assessment of the individual teaching and management merits of tenured and non-tenured teaching and research staff, for the allocation of salary bonuses, as laid down in Sections 55 and 69 of Organic Law 6/2001 on Universities of 21st December.
- Evaluation of the teaching activity of teaching and research staff of private universities.
- Evaluation of the activities, programmes, services and management of the universities and institutions of higher education.
- Promotion of quality assessment and the comparison of quality criteria within the European and international contexts.
- Prepare studies to improve and innovate models used for assessment, certification and accreditation.
- Issuing of assessment reports intended for the universities, the education administration authorities, social stakeholders and society in general.
- Advisory service for the educational administration, authorities, universities and other institutions within the scope of their functions.
- Establishing linkages for co-operation and collaboration with other State, autonomous regional and international agencies with assessment, accreditation and certification functions.
- Responsibilities assigned to it through agreement by DURSI and the universities and other functions assigned to it by the Catalan Universities Law, the AQU Catalunya statutes and the other prevailing regulations.

# Values

The activities of AQU Catalunya are guided by a set of values that underline its engagement to the improvement of quality. The values upheld by AQU Catalunya are as follows:

- View quality as a way of doing things and of working better. AQU Catalunya was the first agency certified by ISO standard 9000.
- Innovate continuously in both methodologies and processes.
- Maintain a European focus with respect to the activities carried out to allow the smoothest possible integration of the Catalan university system in the European Area for Higher Education.
- Assure the maximum transparency, objectivity, impartiality and equanimity with respect to the services that it renders. The users of AQU Catalunya's services are assured of the rights to information, direct personalised attention, and to submit claims, complaints and suggestions in relation to the services that are provided. The methods of procedure AQU Catalunya are set out in its Code of Ethics, which is approved by the Board of Directors.
- Foster co-operation between the universities, the Administration and AQU Catalunya with the aim to generate maximum added value.
- Foster co-operation with other national and international bodies and agencies that have the same purpose.
- Work through a network of experts on issues relating to university quality that allows the rapid development of knowledge and the promotion of the culture of quality in the entire Catalan university system.



## Governing bodies

### 1 President:

The president supervises the achievement of objectives assigned to AQU Catalunya, serves as the institutional representation of the Agency and inform the Government and the Parliament of Catalonia of its activity.

### 2 Board of Directors:

This is the steering body of AQU Catalunya. It is formed by the rectors of the Catalan universities, the chairs of the Social Councils of the public universities, the representatives of the Ministry of Universities, Research and the Information Society and independent figures from the academic world. The Board of Directors is the body responsible for establishing policies and strategic objectives, and for approving the financial management of AQU Catalunya. It may act in plenary sessions or as Standing Committee.

### 3 Director:

The post of director is responsible for the management of AQU Catalunya and holds full representation of the Board of Directors with respect to the implementation of resolutions adopted by the latter. The director directs, organises, manages and inspects the services of AQU in accordance with the directives of the Board of Directors. The management has the support of the permanent advisory bodies within AQU Catalunya, which allow for better inter-university co-ordination of the activities that are carried out. The permanent advisory bodies include the vice-rectors' committees for quality, teaching staff and students; meetings with representatives of the Social Councils, and meetings with the persons responsible for the technical units that deal with quality in the universities. Quality Assessment, on the one hand, and Teaching and Research are the two functional areas that the activities of AQU Catalunya are based on, in addition to two others Planning and Communication, and, which cover the entire organisation.

## Assessment bodies

### 4 Quality Assessment Committee:

This committee has powers in the field of assessment, accreditation and certification of degree standards, activities, centres, and quality assessment systems and processes. For the good practice of its functions, this committee has formed three specific committees:

#### a Specific Committee for the Assessment of Degree Standards and Programmes:

This committee is responsible for the assessment of courses leading to recognised and non-recognised degree qualifications awarded by universities and institutions of higher education, certification of course quality, accreditation of courses within the framework of the European Area of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and the issuing of the respective reports on results.

#### b Specific Committee for the Quality Assessment of University Centres and Activities:

This committee is responsible, amongst other matters, for the assessment of educational institutions in Catalonia that offer courses leading to higher degrees awarded by foreign awarding bodies; accreditation of the systems and procedures for the quality assessment of universities, excluding those relating to the teaching function of faculty/academic staff; and evaluation of the activities, processes, services and management of the universities and institutions of higher education.

#### c Specific Committee for the Assessment of Individual Merits and Activities:

This committee is responsible for assessing the individual teaching and management merits of tenured and non-tenured teaching and research staff, allocating salary bonuses in accordance with Sections 55 and 69 of the LOU; accrediting the systems and procedures for the quality assessment of universities with respect to the teaching function of faculty/academic staff; and the issuing of assessment and appraisal reports on individual merits and reports certifying the teaching activity of faculty/academic staff.

## 5 Research Assessment Committee:

This committee has powers regarding the issuing of accreditation of research and advanced research which, in addition to recognising research work, are necessary for appointment to the categories of assistant professor and full professor at Catalan universities; competencies in the assessment of the activity of researchers and also in the assessment of the individual research merits of tenured and non-tenured researchers on faculty. Six specific committees have been created to carry out its functions on each level: Humanities, Social Sciences, Medical and Health Sciences, Experimental Sciences, Life Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture.

## 6 Tenure-Track Lecturer and Collaborating Lecturer Committee:

This committee has powers regarding the issuing of preliminary reports for the recruitment of faculty in the categories of tenure-track lecturer and collaborating lecturer by the Catalan public universities. Six specific committees, one in each area of knowledge, have been created for the purpose of carrying out its functions: Humanities, Social Sciences, Medical and Health Sciences, Experimental Sciences, Life Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture.

### Governing bodies

Standing Committee

1 President

2 Board of Directors

3 Director

### Advisory and co-operative bodies

Vice-Rectors Committee (Quality, Teaching Staff, Students and Academic Planning, etc.)  
Social Councils  
Technical Units

### Operative unit

Advisers and coordinators

Collaborators

Quality Assessment

Teaching Staff and Research

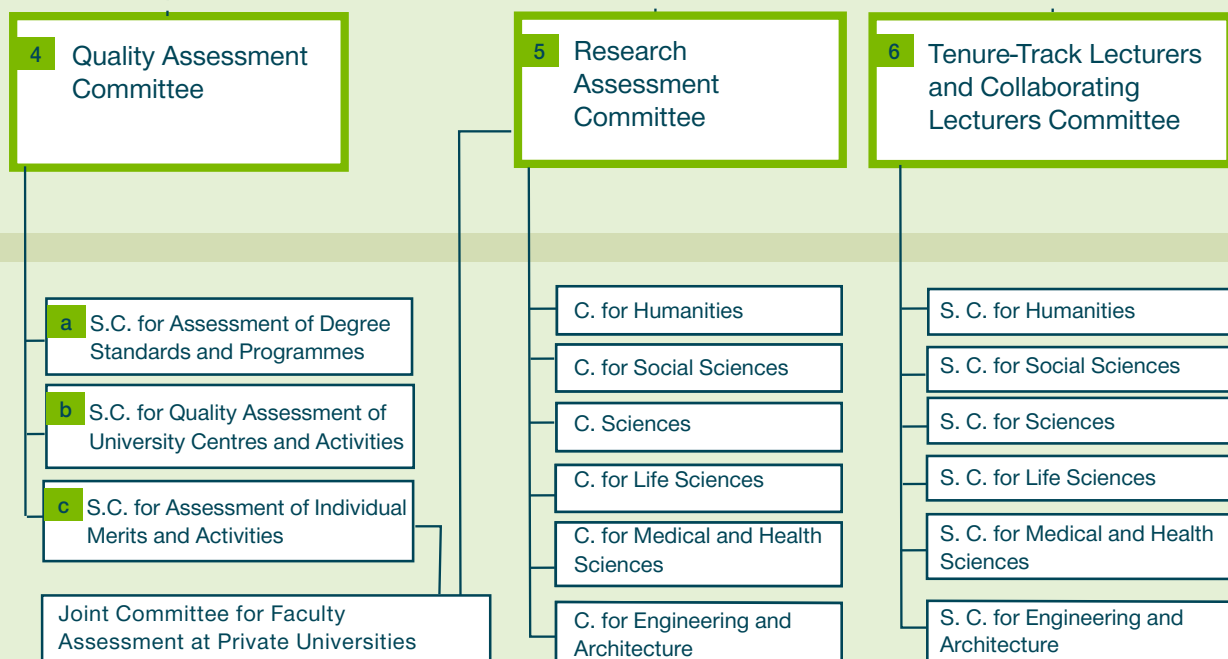
Planning and Communication

Administration

The Catalan Universities Act distinguishes two types of body on which the work of AQU Catalunya must be based: **governing bodies** and **assessment bodies**. The decision-making process of the assessment bodies is not bound by any governing body in order to ensure their total independence.

# Organisation

## Assessment bodies



# Activities

## Quality assessment

The work of AQU Catalunya within the context of quality assessment is based on five lines of action:

### Quality of educational programmes

The objective in this field is to carry out evaluations of quality and the monitoring of plans for course improvement, and to supervise the correct integration of these courses in the European Area of Higher Education (EAHE). For this purpose, AQU Catalunya carries out different programmes that maintain continuity in course assessment undertaken, including programmes for defining new curricula that foster, over and above any formal change, the design of new curricula within the framework of the European Area; programmes to evaluate and design new European master's degrees; programmes to monitor plans for improving and adapting degree standards to the EAHE; programmes for the accreditation of non-recognised degrees; and programmes to evaluate courses offered by distance learning and on the Internet.

### Quality of educational institutions and research centres

AQU Catalunya uses an assessment method that gives authorisation to set up educational institutions in Catalonia that offer courses leading to higher degrees awarded by foreign awarding bodies. It also assesses the suitability of affiliated centres, as well as developing methodology to evaluate research centres with the intention of fostering quality system implementation in them.

### Annual assessment report

With the objective of rendering accounts on the results of the assessments carried out, AQU Catalunya produces an annual report that contains the main data and information obtained from the processes of assessing the quality of both the degree standards and the institutions. The report is appropriately disseminated across the whole Catalan university system.

### Educational impact

In order to measure educational impact, AQU Catalunya promotes studies and reports, such as the evaluation of job placement of university graduates, or evaluation of educational quality from the employers' standpoint, as the starting point for improving mutual collaboration with branches of economic and professional activity in the field of the evaluation of quality in university education.

### Studies and reports

In order to improve the instruments and procedures that are used, AQU Catalunya carries out different studies intended for the universities, the education administration authorities, social stakeholders and society in general. In this respect, one particular characteristic of AQU Catalunya is that its activities are carried out through specific working committees made up of experts from the university world that generate studies, technical papers and general frameworks. One of the priorities within this field is to promote the involvement of students in the processes for evaluating university courses, in accordance with the Berlin Communiqué and in reference to the European Area of Higher Education.

# Assessment of teaching staff and research

The activities carried out by AQU Catalunya with regard to the assessment of teaching staff in the universities in Catalonia are organised into five main areas:

## Assessment of tenure-track and collaborating lecturers

Setting and planning of calls for applications for preliminary reports for the recruitment of tenure-track lecturers and collaborating lecturers by the Catalan public universities, and the setting and planning of resolution procedures for appeals lodged in the various calls.

## Accreditations of research and advanced research

Accreditation of research and advanced research is a form of acknowledgement and confers prestige on research activity, in addition to being an indispensable requirement for all teachers seeking appointment to the categories of tenured assistant professor and full professor at a public university. In this regard, AQU Catalunya sets and plans the calls for applications for issuing research and advanced research accreditation, together with the resolution procedures for appeals lodged in the various calls.

## Assessment of the teaching staff of private universities

The assessment of teaching and research by non-tenured teaching staff in the private universities is determined by AQU Catalunya through agreements with the private universities.



## Assessment of the teaching merits of teaching staff

AQU Catalunya certifies the mechanisms used by the universities to evaluate the quality of the teaching merits of university teaching staff. Together with the programme for certification of the teaching staff assessment model, it has established the procedure for issuing teaching activity certificates for members of faculty who hold a research and/or advanced research accreditation issued by AQU Catalunya, in accordance with Section 47.3 of the Catalan Universities Act.

## Methodological co-operation in the evaluation of research

AQU Catalunya collaborates with institutions in Catalonia that work in the field of improving the procedures and methodologies of research evaluation.

## European and international standing and exchange

In order to assure the constant updating of its services and integration of the Catalan university system in the EAHE, AQU Catalunya operates within the context of Europe and prioritises international connections and exchanges of experience and knowledge with various institutions in the same field of activity according to the following lines of action:

### International quality promotion and co-operation.

At the European and international level, AQU Catalunya co-operates closely with the ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – the European network of agencies), of which it is a founding member; the INQAAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), and specific projects that are mainly funded by the EU (TEMPUS, SOCRATES, LEONARDO). The results of this co-operation are shared with the Catalan universities and Administration to be able to work jointly and to promote activities for improving the quality of the Catalan university system and its integration in the European Area of Higher Education. It likewise collaborates in the meetings of the group of quality assessment agencies of the Autonomous Regional Communities and ANECA (Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation).

### Exchange

In order to simplify exchanges of experience and knowledge, AQU Catalunya promotes the holding of workshops for thought and discussion in conjunction with the Catalan universities, the autonomous regions, ENQA and other entities, to which individuals from other countries are usually invited in order to gain an understanding of other situations and for progress to be made within the EAHE.

## Communication and publicising of AQU activities

AQU Catalunya makes all information concerning its activities available to the university community and society at large as a means of encouraging the focus on quality and other issues of importance that need to be brought to public attention. The communication and dissemination of publications are for this reason free of charge:

### Communication

The AQU Catalunya web site [www.aqucatalunya.org](http://www.aqucatalunya.org), a quarterly bulletin (available on-line and in printed version) and an on-line monthly bulletin (*AQU NOTÍCIES*), which gives a monthly review of the most important news items, all provide information on activities going on in the Catalan university system, as well as keeping the system itself constantly informed.

### Publications

AQU Catalunya publishes and distributes various types of publication, including annual reports that serve as accountability to society of the results of assessments carried out; general frameworks, which lay down and systematise the best practices in strategic fields, that are distributed to the entire university community; specific publications on particular topics of special interest in the field of university quality; and publications resulting from the workshops for thought and discussion that are organised by AQU Catalunya and other dossiers produced in relation to the work of AQU Catalunya.







[www.aqucatalunya.org](http://www.aqucatalunya.org)



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