

AQU CATALUNYA SELF- ASSESSMENT REPORT 2021

Barcelona, December 2021



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1. BACKGROUND	4
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT	4
3. CHANGES SINCE THE LAST FULL REVIEW	5
3.1. <i>General changes</i>	5
3.2. <i>New external quality assurance activities</i>	6
PART 2. PROGRESS SINCE LAST REVIEW (2017)	8
4. ACTION PLAN 2017-2022	8
5. PROGRESS REPORT PART 3 ESG	9
5.1. <i>ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance</i>	9
5.2. <i>ESG Standard 3.2 Official status</i>	11
5.3. <i>ESG Standard 3.5 Resources</i>	11
5.4. <i>ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct</i>	13
5.5. <i>ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies</i>	13
6. PROGRESS REPORT PART 2 ESG	14
6.1. <i>ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose</i>	14
6.2. <i>ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes</i>	15
6.3. <i>ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts</i>	15
6.4. <i>ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes</i>	17
6.5. <i>ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals</i>	18
PART 3. FOCUS AREAS	20
7. PART 3 OF THE ESG.....	20
7.1. <i>ESG Standard 3.3 Independence</i>	20
8. PART 2 OF THE ESG.....	22
8.1. <i>ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance</i>	22
8.2. <i>ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting</i>	23
9. ENHANCEMENT STANDARD	24
9.1. <i>ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis</i>	24
PART 4. ESG IN THE NEW ACTIVITIES	29
10. NEW EXTERNAL REVIEW ACTIVITIES	29
10.1. <i>ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance</i>	29
10.2. <i>ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose</i>	30
10.3. <i>ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes</i>	30
10.4. <i>ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts</i>	32
10.5. <i>ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes</i>	33

10.6.	<i>ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting</i>	33
10.7.	<i>ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals</i>	33
PART 5.	SWOT ANALYSIS	34
PART 6.	CONCLUSIONS	36
ANNEX 1:	DRAFTING OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT	39
ANNEX 2:	TABLE OF CONTENTS, ACTION PLAN 2022	40
ANNEX 3:	RESULTS OF ESG REVIEWS	41
ANNEX 4:	ACTION PLAN 2019-2022	42
ANNEX 5:	LIST OF TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR AQU CATALUNYA STAFF 2020	52
ANNEX 6:	LIST OF TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR EXPERTS	56
ANNEX 7:	CONSIDERATION OF ESG PART 1 IN REVIEW METHODOLOGIES	63
ANNEX 8:	CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN AQU METHODOLOGY AND THE EUROPEAN APPROACH	68
ANNEX 9:	CAME ANALYSIS APPLIED TO SWOT	69
ANNEX 10:	GLOSSARY OF TERMS	70

PART 1. BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) is an external quality assurance agency that was established in 1996 and operates in Catalonia, Spain. The [Catalan Higher Education System](#) consists of 12 universities (seven public and five private) and 13 centres offering arts higher education programmes. A total of 551 bachelor's degrees, 653 master's degrees and 252 doctoral degrees are offered to some 252,000 students. The system has almost 23,000 teachers, while each year more than 80,000 new students join and more than 51,000 graduates¹.

AQU Catalunya was the first external review agency created in Spain and, after two legal reforms, it is now regulated by [Law 15/2015 of 21 July 2015 on AQU Catalunya](#). It is a full member of [ENQA](#) (2000), is registered in [EQAR](#) (2008), is a member of [INQAAHE](#) (1998)², and is a founding member of [REACU](#) (2006). AQU Catalunya has been recognised by the [World Federation for Medical Education \(2021\)](#) and is ISO 9001-certified for quality management (2000) and ISO 27001-certified for information security management (2015).

The Catalan agency [has carried out an assessment of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Europe](#) three times (2007, 2012, 2017) and in 2022 it will be the first agency to carry out this assessment as a Targeted Review.

2. Development of the self-assessment report

The director of AQU Catalunya has appointed an internal drafting team to gather the relevant information and prepare the draft Self-assessment Report (SaR). Meanwhile, the Self-assessment Committee has been appointed to review and validate the draft SaR. The composition of the Self-assessment Committee reflects the different groups of stakeholders involved in AQU Catalunya. ([See Annex 1](#)).

The draft Self-assessment Report was prepared in September and October 2021 by the internal working group. In October, the structure of the document was sent to the Self-assessment Committee for approval. In November, the document was sent for review by the different stakeholders, both internal (including AQU Catalunya staff and committees and commissions) and external (universities, experts, government, etc.).

¹ Source: <https://estudis.aqu.cat/euc/en/Comu/Inici#> (October 2021)

² From 2013 to 2021 AQU Catalunya held the secretariat of INQAAHE, and as of November 2021 it provides logistical support for this network at its facilities in Barcelona.

After receiving the comments, the Self-assessment Committee validated the final version of the Self-assessment Report to be submitted for approval by the [Standing Committee of the AQU Catalunya Governing Board](#).

3. Changes since the last full review

3.1. General changes

Although there have been some legislative changes since the previous external review, none of these have affected the type of activities carried out by the Agency or altered the composition of the Catalan Higher Education System.

In these five years, there have been no changes to the structure of the governing bodies, assessment bodies or advisory bodies, or to the operational structure of AQU Catalunya. The organisation chart, the description of the functions and the composition of each of the bodies, as well as the Agency's internal structure by area, can be consulted on the [corporate website](#). The only notable change was the appointment of the new director on 1 November 2021, when the previous director's term of office ended.

During this period, the system through which the Agency is funded by the Catalan Government has remained unchanged and has covered all AQU Catalunya's needs.

The most relevant general changes made since the previous review are:

- **The approval of AQU Catalunya's new Code of Ethics.** In 2019, the Agency's Code of Ethics was updated to reflect its values and its implementation through commitments. Everyone associated with AQU Catalunya must sign and adhere to the Code. [More information on the Code of Ethics](#).
- **The adoption of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022.** Since 2009, AQU Catalunya has been working on the basis of four-year strategic plans. After a drafting process guided by the opinion of [various agents](#) through a [public participation process](#), the [Strategic Plan was approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board](#). More information on the [Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#).
- **The gradual introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals and Corporate Social Responsibility.** In 2019, AQU Catalunya adapted its [Annual Report into an Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Report](#), and by 2022 also the structure of its Annual Action Plan, to the Corporate Social Responsibility commitments ([See Annex 2](#)).
- **The adaptation of activities to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic**, including the transformation of AQU Catalunya's external review processes from face-to-face to

virtual, making it of the first European agencies to do so successfully³. The model, which has been presented in various European forums, has been applied from March 2020 to December 2021. As of 2022, a blended model will be used for external review processes. More information on [the adaptation of AQU Catalunya to the pandemic](#) and on [the blended external review model to be applied in 2022](#).

- [The approval of the General framework for incorporating the gender perspective in higher education teaching](#) (2018), which sets out guidelines and recommendations for facilitating effective gender mainstreaming in teaching in all subject areas.
- The approval of the [Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework](#) (2019), which responds to the need to create an instrument to classify higher education studies according to the expected type of training for each level.
- **The move to a new headquarters** in the centre of Barcelona (2020), which improves the Agency's institutional presence and is better adapted to the needs of its activity.
- **The updating of dissemination tools to improve the accessibility and transparency of activities.** Specifically, [modification of the corporate website \(2020\)](#), which has a responsive design that adapts to different mobile devices while also complying with the European Accessibility Directive; [updating of the corporate image](#), on the occasion of the Agency's 25th anniversary (2021); revamping of the [Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya \(EUC\) website](#) to adapt it to future university students' needs for information on the [quality of degree programmes](#) (2020), and the use of social media ([Twitter](#)) to provide information for the university community.

3.2. New external quality assurance activities

AQU Catalunya has launched two new activities in the period 2017-2022:

- **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.** This methodology has started to be applied in the ex-ante accreditation process of two joint master's degrees. Two documents based on the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#) have been created: [Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programme accreditation using the European Approach framework](#) and [Guide to ex-ante accreditation of Joint Programmes using the European Approach. More information on the European Approach in Catalunya.](#)
- **Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes.** AQU Catalunya has started a new activity to assess Short Learning Programmes/Micro-credentials. This programme is based on AQU Catalunya's [ex-ante accreditation methodology](#). In order to implement the programme, the guide [Ex-ante accreditation of Short](#)

³ Strategy for action of AQU Catalunya in the exceptional circumstances resulting from the effects of SARS-COV-2 Coronavirus ([ENQA webinar: online site visits in times of Covid-19](#), 2020); [Quality assurance in times of emergency remote teaching](#) (EQAF, 2020); [Can virtual external quality assurance work for HE?](#) (Crozier, F. and Shah Abdullah, H., 2021).



[Learning Programmes](#) has been created. [More information on the ex-ante accreditation of short learning/micro-credential programmes.](#)

PART 2. PROGRESS SINCE LAST REVIEW (2017)

This section discusses the progress that has been made in all the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) since the previous review, with the exception of the ESG that are discussed in depth in Part 3: Focus Areas of this report.

4. Action Plan 2017-2022

In the assessment of compliance with the ESG by AQU Catalunya ([see results in Annex 3](#)), ENQA and EQAR made a total of 16 recommendations, on the basis of which the Agency devised a total of 23 actions that were included in the Action Plan 2017-2022 ([see Annex 4](#)).

AQU Catalunya has responded to all the recommendations with the exception of two⁴, as it considered that it did not have the legal capacity to deal with them, and consequently they were closed without any associated action. For each action, the person responsible for carrying it out and the schedule for its implementation were established.

In June 2019, AQU Catalunya submitted a [follow-up report on the Action Plan to ENQA](#). As of October 2021, the status of deployment of the Action Plan is as follows:

Table 1. Fulfilment of the Action Plan 2019-2022

Action status	Situation as at October 2021	%
Complete	20	87%
Ongoing	1	4%
Pending	2	9%
Total	23	100%

At the date of closure of this report, 87% of the actions had been completed and only 1 was ongoing. AQU Catalunya has monitored the Action Plan 2019-2022 on a six-monthly basis. The results of the monitoring are recorded in the minutes of the Internal Coordination Committee, which are published on the AQU Catalunya intranet for consultation by all staff.

The following two sections detail the improvements made over the last five years.

⁴ See Annex 4, actions 4 and 17.

5. Progress report Part 3 ESG

5.1. ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

In the last review, a suggestion from ENQA and a recommendation from EQAR were received regarding this standard:

- The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation. In the [ENQA letter of 26 February 2018, in addition to Membership Decision of June 21 2017](#), the ENQA Board considered this should be a suggestion for further improvement, not a recommendation.
- The Register Committee concurred with the panel that such consultancy activities [Training activity in 2011] should be clearly separated from external QA activities, in particular when those activities are carried out for the same higher education institution. The Committee drew AQU's attention to the guiding principles set out in Annex 5 to the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG and underlined that AQU is expected to make a substantive change report should it resume the same or similar consultancy-type activities offered to higher education institutions.

The response from AQU Catalunya was that it does not carry out consultancy activities. However, in order to clarify the principles, activities and commitments in relation to the external review services it provides, in 2018 the AQU Catalunya Governing Board approved the Agency's [Catalogue of Services](#), a [public](#) document which is duly disseminated to interested parties.

Every four years AQU Catalunya draws up a Strategic Plan, based on a SWOT analysis, which is submitted for public consultation and approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board. This document guides the Agency's activities during the four-year period in which it is operational. AQU Catalunya is currently working in accordance with the Strategic Plan 2019-2022, which was drawn up taking into account the SWOT analysis carried out in 2019.

The strategic priorities and actions of the Strategic Plan are specified annually in the [Action Plan](#), which is approved by the Agency's Governing Board and is the instrument that sets out AQU Catalunya's projects and activities for the annual period. At the end of the year, the Agency produces an [Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Report](#) in which it provides details of the progress of the Action Plan. This report is also approved by the Governing Board and is published on the corporate website.

The Strategic Plan is monitored every six months by the AQU Catalunya Internal Coordination Committee⁵. The AQU Catalunya Governing Board is informed of the progress on an annual basis while the results achieved are presented to the Board every four years.

The annual Action Plan is monitored on a quarterly basis, also through AQU Catalunya's Internal Coordination Committee. Details of the fulfilment of the plan are set out in the [Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Report](#) that is submitted to the Governing Board for approval. Furthermore, the projects carried out by AQU Catalunya are constantly monitored by the project manager and the Project Monitoring Committee. Finally, a meta-evaluation report is drawn up for all projects and processes (see [ESG 3.6.](#))

The external review activities carried out each year by AQU Catalunya are planned the previous year, together with the corresponding budget, and are approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board.

Over the last five years, AQU Catalunya has carried out the following external reviews within the scope of the ESG:

Table 2. External reviews carried out

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 ⁶
PROGRAMMES					
Validation	94	163	63	71	60
Modification	121	263	258	195	161
Monitoring	164	23	44	55	54
Accreditation	133	140	166	130	210
European Approach for QA of Joint Progr.				1	1
Ex-ante accreditation of SLP				33 ⁷	<i>Pending</i>
INSTITUTIONS					
Ex-post IQAs certification	--	--	4	6	16
Institutional Accreditation		1	3	7	12
Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks	--	--	--	--	7
INTERNATIONAL					
International quality assurance	--	--	1 ⁸	--	--
Review of institutions offering foreign degrees ⁹	--	--	--	--	--

⁵ The Internal Coordination Committee is made up of the heads of the Management, Quality Assessment, Teaching Staff, Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation, IT and Administration departments; the legal adviser and the technical adviser; the coordinator of the AQU Catalunya Teaching Staff Department; and the coordinator of projects and the AQU Catalunya Quality Management System.

⁶ Data closed as of 31 October 2021, with forecast up to 31 December 2021.

⁷ AQU Catalunya has assessed seven different proposals to be taught at 33 Higher education institutions.

⁸ Follow-up report on the review carried out in 2016.

⁹ A programme that is offered, but which is being discontinued because it depends on the demand according to the requirements of the Catalan Government. Next review in 2022.

This table shows how AQU Catalunya's main activity over the last five years continued to be the external review of programmes. However, it also shows the consolidation of Internal Quality Assurance System Certification (IQAS) processes and the introduction of the institutional accreditation process. In addition, and using its capacity for innovation, AQU Catalunya has promoted two new review projects, namely review according to the principles of the European Approach and the review of micro-credentials.

It should be noted that the Catalan Government uses the results of accreditation processes in the areas of university policy. In particular, the government does not authorise new degrees in institutions with at least one programme accredited under conditions. Evidence of this practice is that, since 2019, there has been a decrease in the number of proposals for ex-ante accreditation.

There have been two relevant activities during this five-year period that should be highlighted. Firstly, and in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, AQU Catalunya quickly adapted its review procedures to a virtual format without having to interrupt the review activities. And secondly, as a result of the numerous projects in which it participates, the Agency has strengthened its alliances – mainly in Catalonia, but also at national and international levels – as can be seen in the [Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2020](#) (page 49).

5.2. ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

In the last review, this standard was achieved without any additional recommendations. During this five-year period, there has been no change in the status of AQU Catalunya that would affect its compliance with this standard.

5.3. ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

In the last review, ENQA made three recommendations and AQU Catalunya responded by setting out six actions.

- The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term.
- The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.
- The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.

Of the planned actions, two have not yet been carried out, as they were related to the approval of the Contract programme¹⁰ which the Catalan Government has not implemented. As a result, the Agency is still funded through the same system. However, over the past four years, the contribution of the Catalan administration to AQU Catalunya has increased by 37% to ensure that all the needs of the external review processes (material and human resources) are covered. The Catalan administration is the main contributor of financial resources to the Agency, with the rest coming from projects or teaching staff assessment fees.

Table 3. Evolution of AQU Catalunya's budget

	Budgeted revenue	Contribution of the Catalan Government	% Contribution/total
2017	€3,645,566.23	€3,161,920.29	87%
2021	€4,806,178.17	€4,312,362.83	90%

AQU Catalunya has 51 people on its staff, 74% of whom are women and 26% men. Seventy-one per cent of AQU Catalunya's staff perform technical tasks and 29% perform administrative tasks. Of these people, 42 are permanent members of staff and the rest work on temporary contracts, although a request has been made to the Catalan Administration that these temporary staff be made permanent by 2022.

One of the actions that have been implemented and consolidated over the last four years has been the quantification of the volume of activities and the number of staff required to carry them out. [See areas of activity](#).

The other three actions that have been completed relate to the Staff Training Plan. AQU Catalunya has had a Training Plan for many years, but since 2019 it has been oriented towards the development of staff competencies, based on the document [Quality assurance professional competencies framework](#) (2016). In addition, it classifies training as basic – when it is essential to achieve strategic objectives – or specific training to improve competencies in the workplace. Strategic objectives for staff training are also set annually. For more information, see [Annex 5. List of training activities for AQU Catalunya staff in 2020](#), which shows the shift towards institutional accreditation.

¹⁰ Four-year contract between the Catalan Government and AQU Catalunya to fund the Agency's activities.

Finally, every year since 2017, staff have been given competency development appraisals, with the heads of area identifying the training needed to improve each staff member's competency profile and to achieve the Agency's strategic objectives.

5.4. ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

In the last review, this standard was achieved without any additional recommendations. However, over these five years, AQU Catalunya has bolstered this point through the following actions:

- The approval of the new [Code of Ethics](#) (2019), which updates the previous one from 2008 and which is based on commitments that apply the values that guide professional conduct at AQU Catalunya and in which all persons working or collaborating with AQU Catalunya are trained.
- The annual appraisal of the professional competencies of AQU Catalunya staff, with a review of staff performance and training needs. The aim is to ensure the necessary level of staff training and expertise and that staff are committed to the activities they carry out, in accordance with the Strategic Plan.
- Improvement of the review process (meta-evaluation) of AQU Catalunya's Internal Quality Management and Information Security System, which is structured on three levels: by projects, by areas and processes, and global. [See more information on the meta-evaluation process.](#)
- An IT platform (ICARUS-Millores) has been created to monitor the Agency's Improvement Plan, which is based on the aforementioned reviews and the different internal and external audits and meta-evaluation processes carried out annually (quality assurance, information security, data protection, risk assessment, financial, etc.).
- A platform of activity indicators and targets (ICARUS-Indicadors) has also been created and is used to monitor AQU Catalunya's activity and to supply the different types of information requested.

5.5. ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

In the last review, this standard was achieved without any additional recommendations. However, it is important to note that during this five-year period AQU Catalunya has worked to implement the Action Plan 2019-2022, which includes the actions set out in response to the recommendations of the last external review, and that in 2022 it will carry out the review in the form of a Targeted Review, as proposed by ENQA and EQAR.

Another noteworthy point is that in 2021, AQU Catalunya received recognition from the [World Federation for Medical Education](#) and is now able to accredit medical schools in accordance with the standards of said federation.

Furthermore, AQU Catalunya's Quality Management and Information Security System undergoes an annual external certification process, with the resulting improvements incorporated into the Agency's annual Improvement Plan.

AQU Catalunya also carries out an annual financial and regulatory compliance audit, which is submitted to the Governing Board as an accountability report.

6. Progress report Part 2 ESG

6.1. ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

In the last assessment, this standard was achieved with a supplementary recommendation that AQU Catalunya was unable to meet because it exceeded its functions.

- The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose. In [ENQA letter of 26 February 2018, in addition to Membership Decision of June 21 2017](#), the ENQA Board considered this should be a suggestion for further improvement, not a recommendation.

Since 2017 AQU Catalunya has developed the methodologies associated with the two new review processes (the adaptation of the European Approach for the accreditation of joint programmes and the accreditation for Short Learning Programmes¹¹) and has specified the methodological material for institutional accreditation.

The development of the institutional accreditation methodology is the most relevant process for the future of the Catalan Higher Education System, as it consolidates the shift from programme-based accreditation to institutional accreditation. This methodology was envisaged in the revision of the [Framework for Validation, Monitoring, Modification and Accreditation \(2016\)](#) and, in 2021, the Governing Board approved the commitment to promote [institutional accreditation of centres during the period 2022-2024](#).

This assessment has been developed taking into account AQU Catalunya's internal procedure for the development of assessment methodologies and the opinion of all stakeholders, including a [public consultation](#). Prior to being approved, it was also submitted to the Institutional and Programme Review Commission for consideration.

At the present date, the [Standards and Criteria for the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres](#) and the [Guide to the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres](#) have been developed and are due to be implemented for the first time in 2022.

¹¹ The methodologies of the new activities are described in Part 4 of this report.

The approved methodology is designed to be suitable for achieving the stated aims and objectives, considering the applicable regulations.

Finally, in 2019 AQU Catalunya revised all the methodologies to update them in terms of regulatory aspects, inclusive language and gender perspective. Furthermore, in compliance with the ESG, the opportunity was also taken to further clarify some aspects that were identified in the previous assessment under ESG 2.1 (such as ESG 1.4).

6.2. ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

In the last assessment, this standard was achieved with one recommendation:

- The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.

The Agency has taken this recommendation into account in two ways.

Firstly, AQU Catalunya has monitored the conditions identified in the different external review processes. In the case of the validation (ex-ante accreditation) of degree programmes, universities are obliged to respond to the points identified in the review reports as requiring special attention two years after the date of accreditation. In the case of the re-accreditation of degree programmes, for those degree programmes with accreditation reports with an overall rating of “with conditions”, AQU Catalunya performs a follow-up two years after receiving the accreditation report.

In the case of institutional accreditation processes, AQU Catalunya monitors the aspects identified in the review process as “with conditions” two years after receiving the review report.

A noteworthy aspect of this five-year period was the start of the institutional accreditation process. AQU Catalunya has consolidated the certification process for the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS). Institutions that certify their IQAS and have accredited more than half of their bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees can apply for institutional accreditation. At present, AQU Catalunya has certified correct IQAS implementation at 26 centres.

6.3. ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

In the last assessment, this standard was achieved with two recommendations from the panel:

- The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures.

- The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG.

AQU Catalunya has addressed these recommendations through three actions.

Firstly, in 2021 AQU Catalunya is in the process of signing a *Memorandum of Understanding with the European Students Union (ESU)* to include international students in the assessment processes.

Secondly, the number of experts from outside the Catalan Higher Education System has increased as follows¹²:

Table 4. Origin of external experts in the last five years in external review processes

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 ¹³	TOTAL
Catalan System	70	78	86	83	68	385
External to the Catalan System	129	198	190	206	219	942
TOTAL	199	276	276	289	287	1,327

The third action relates to the training of experts, for which AQU Catalunya has organised regular training sessions. All experts complete a training session the first time they take part in a review process. As an example, in the specific case of the accreditation process, AQU Catalunya holds a monthly training or retraining session for people who take part in assessment processes. If a person is unable to attend the scheduled session, AQU Catalunya organises a specific session, and provides online support materials. Furthermore, specific training sessions are held for the people who act as secretaries of the accreditation visits (seven sessions have been held during the five-year period). In addition, a specific session was held to address all the adjustments made as a result of the pandemic. [See Annex 6. List of training activities for experts.](#)

Table 5. Number of training sessions held and people trained during the sessions

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 ¹⁴	TOTAL
Accreditation						
No. of training sessions	9	9	9	15	10	52
No. of people trained	97	137	111	152	118	615
IQAS Certification						

¹² It should be noted that the Catalan higher education system functions independently of the Spanish system.

¹³ Data closed as of 31 October 2021, with forecast up to 31 December 2021.

¹⁴ Data closed as of 14 October 2021.

No. of training sessions	--	--	2	4	2	8
No. of people trained	--	--	12	20	26	58

AQU Catalunya wishes to emphasize the technical and management support and accompaniment that AQU provided for experts in the performance of their duties.

It should also be noted that AQU Catalunya invites experts to participate in sessions or conferences on relevant issues, such as teaching formats, dual training, the *European Approach*, certification of quality systems and institutional accreditation, to improve their knowledge in these areas.

Special mention should be made of the fact that AQU Catalunya has continued to strengthen the specific training for students with system-specific training sessions in collaboration with the [student council body for Catalan universities \(CEUCAT\)](#), which were suspended after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, the management of experts is a fundamental process for AQU Catalunya, which is why the internal procedure for the management of experts was reviewed during this five-year period and a cross-sectional meta-evaluation of this process was carried out in 2020 to analyse the strengths and weaknesses. Work has also been done to refine the indicator calculation to obtain reliable and comparable data.

The selection of experts from [AQU Catalunya's pool of reviewers](#) is carried out in accordance with procedure S.02 Management of experts. AQU Catalunya provides all experts with a specific mailbox for answering technical, financial and logistical queries. Queries are analysed on a semi-annual basis to improve internal management. AQU Catalunya also assesses the performance of the experts in the review processes and takes this information into account in subsequent review processes. All information is recorded in the NEXUS application.

6.4. ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

In the last review, this standard was achieved without any additional recommendations and was noted as a strength of the assessment process.

However, given the importance of this criterion, AQU Catalunya has implemented three actions: the maintenance of the strengths of this standard; the completion of the meta-evaluation process for the 2014-2017 accreditation process (and the planning of the 2018-2022 meta-evaluation); and the incorporation into this report of the following clarifications:

- In all external review processes carried out by AQU Catalunya, institutions are given the opportunity to correct factual errors.
- The meta-evaluation processes carried out by AQU Catalunya contribute to ensuring the consistency of the judgements made in the review processes.

6.5. ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Appeals

In the last review, compliance with this standard came with a recommendation from the panel:

- The panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members.

In 2017 the Appeals Committee consisted of three members, all of them from Catalonia. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of [Appeals Committee](#) members was increased from three to five, two of whom are from outside the Catalan Higher Education System.

Persons or institutions who disagree with the outcome of a review process may apply an appeal with the Appeals Committee. During the period in question, the following external degree review appeals have been submitted:

Table 6. Number of appeals

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
PROGRAMMES					
Appeals regarding validation		1	2	3	1
Appeals regarding accreditation	15	1	1	0	0
INSTITUTIONS					
Appeals regarding IQAS certification	--	--	0	0	0
Appeals regarding institutional accreditation	--	--	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	2	3	3	1

To summarise the above table, 24 appeals were received and examined in relation to the assessment of more than 1,300 degrees, representing 1.8% of the total. Of these appeals, 13 were granted.

Complaints

The handling of complaints is described in internal procedure S.04.01. AQU Catalunya has an open channel on the website for receiving complaints and queries (called the [Help Desk](#)). This Help Desk is mainly used by students and teachers.

Queries and, in particular, complaints received are answered immediately and subsequently analysed by the Quality Management and Information Security Committee every six months to take corrective action.

The queries and complaints received relate to all activities carried out by the agency (website, assessment of teaching staff, technological incidents, etc.). Of the total number of queries and complaints, only 15% are related to the degrees and institutions assessed.

Table 7. Number and type of queries and complaints received

Type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Query	90	98	92	132	79
Complaint	13	10	10	23	8
TOTAL	103	108	102	155	87

Furthermore, universities may inform whether any conflict of interest applies to any of the committee's members of the External Review Committees. During 2021, AQU Catalunya created an indicator integrated into the scorecard that monitors rejected committees. In 2021, of 138 committees appointed (122 for programme accreditation and 16 for IQAS certification), only one committee was disallowed.

PART 3. FOCUS AREAS

7. Part 3 of the ESG

7.1. ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

In the last external review, this standard was considered partially compliant, and two recommendations were made:

- The panel recommends that the agency considers the implications of the close involvement of active HEI representatives in the work of the agency. In particular the impact upon the independence compared to the involvement of more neutral but equally competent stakeholders from other jurisdictions.
- The panel recommends that the agency takes steps to fully separate the roles of the definition and monitoring of procedures on the one hand, and the implementation of those procedures on the other hand.

The Register Committee said:

- The Register Committee noted the agency's clarifications. While it found that the flag on the independence of the Governing Board was largely addressed, the Committee underlined the concerns of the panel with regard to the overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies. The Committee therefore could not follow the panel's conclusion of compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 3.3.

Taking into account the opinion of the EQAR Register Committee¹⁵ and the ENQA Board¹⁶, that AQU Catalunya shares, the first recommendation has not been addressed, as explained in the follow-up report for the [ESG Compliance Action Plan 2019-2022](#).

In relation to the second recommendation, it should be borne in mind that according to the [AQU Catalunya Statutes](#) the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) can

¹⁵ "The Register Committee noted the agency's clarifications. While it found that the flag on the independence of the Governing Board was largely addressed [...]". [Approval of the Application by AQU Catalunya for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register, Ref. RC20/A44](#)

¹⁶ "As regards independence, the Board would like to acknowledge AQU Catalunya's improvement in this area since the last review. The Board is pleased to see that the modifications of the legislation in 2015 have clearly contributed to the agency's organisational independence especially as regards the appointment of staff members." Page 2, ESG 3.3., [Letter in addition to Membership Decision of June 21 2017 of 26 February 2018](#).

carry out its functions through specific committees, whereas the external review committees are temporary bodies that are appointed for a specific review. All members are selected in accordance with the [Profiles and prerequisites for members of AQU external review panels involved in institutional review and teaching staff assessment procedures](#).

The panel's recommendation regarding the separation of roles has been gradually implemented by separating the CAIP and its specific committees, as the decision-making bodies for the reviews, from the external review committees, which carry out the visit, in accordance with the profiles of AQU Catalunya reviewers.

It should be noted that the Appeals Committee operates completely independently from the Assessment and Review Committees.

The compliance of organisational and operational independence is assured by [Articles 1 and 18 of the law 15/2015](#).

“AQU Catalunya, in the exercise of its functions in the promotion and assurance of quality in higher education, shall act objectively and with technical and professional independence, without instruction from any public administration or other institution in the fulfilment of its objectives” [article 1]

“(...) shall act in accordance with prevailing regulations, with technical and professional independence, develop and endorse the criteria and procedures for quality assurance, accreditation, certification and audit, and undertake in their respective areas review, certification and accreditation that fall to the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, for which they shall be ultimately responsible. The Governing Board shall ensure the technical independence of all QA commissions, committees and panels.” [article 18]

AQU's QA commissions, committees and panels therefore continue to be guaranteed their technical and professional independence to establish the criteria and procedures for quality assurance, accreditation, certification and auditing and to issue value judgments in accordance with the provisions, in a way that is totally independence from the universities and government.

The independence of formal outcomes is safeguarded by assuring the independence of all external experts and their work through the nomination procedure and through acceptance of the Commitment to comply with AQU Catalunya's principles of action, its values, Code of Ethics and Policy for quality and information security, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area available on the reviewers database extranet that reviewers receive together with their review assignment.

In relation to this ESG, three additional reflections are worth noting.

The first is that at no time has the lack of independence been a cause for complaint by stakeholders. On the contrary, as shown in the SWOT analysis, one of AQU Catalunya's strengths is considered to be "Rigour and technical independence in the exercise of its functions".

With regard to the comment made in the last external review that AQU Catalunya was financially dependent on the Catalan Administration, it should be noted that although it is true that 90% of AQU Catalunya's budget is funded by the Catalan Government, the control exercised by the Catalan Administration over AQU Catalunya's activities is not related to results, but to compliance with public finance management and administrative contracting regulations. Therefore, in no case is there a lack of independence in the review and subsequent decision-making processes.

Finally, the external review report also indicated that the independence of the Appeals Committee could be improved by including people from outside Catalonia. This recommendation has been addressed, as explained in section [ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals](#).

8. Part 2 of the ESG

8.1. ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

In the last review, the panel gave two recommendations in relation to this standard.

- The panel recommends the agency reflects on how the concept of student-centred learning may become a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).
- The panel recommends that the agency integrates student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4) more consistently into the different evaluation procedures.

In response, AQU Catalunya implemented three actions. In relation to the first recommendation, AQU Catalunya pointed out that standard 1.3 is included in all methodologies, but to make it clearer, the student report was designed to serve as evidence in the institutional accreditation process. This report has been incorporated into the institutional accreditation methodology and has been piloted in the accreditation process in two universities.

In the case of the second recommendation affecting standard 1.4, in 2019 AQU Catalunya conducted a comprehensive review of all assessment methodologies in which this standard was more clearly incorporated.

AQU Catalunya's [Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised university degrees \(2016\)](#) clearly defines the implementation of internal

quality management systems (IQAs) in institutions as being one of the key factors in quality assurance in universities and higher education institutions in Catalonia. More specifically, it lays down that:

“The four main elements that the [Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised university degrees \(2016\)](#) revolves around are: Certification of quality assurance systems: The development of a system of certification for quality assurance systems that are being implemented in institutions should be the cornerstone for simplifying all procedures associated with the VSMA. This should lead to progress towards quality assurance at institutional level, in accordance with the line of work at international level. The aspiration is for universities in the Catalan system to form part of the category of self-accredited/self-accrediting institutions. (...)”

As such, and in the practical application of these principles laid down in the VSMA Framework, AQU Catalunya takes into account the efficacy of the internal quality assurance system (IQAs) in the following aspects:

- The Agency promotes and recognises IQAs certification in that it is indispensable for the institutional accreditation of an institution.
- IQAs implementation is promoted through the inclusion in the VSMA guidebooks of a specific section for the review of IQAs design and/or implementation (where appropriate) in each institution.

All of these actions aim at the promotion and recognition of, as well as giving impetus to, IQAs implementation, as well as helping to greatly reduce the Agency's volume of QA processes through greater trust being placed in the universities' internal QA systems.

The table in [Annex 7 summarises the application of the different standards in Part 1 to the assessment methodologies](#).

8.2. ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

In the last external review, this standard was considered partially compliant, and two recommendations were made:

- The panel recommends the agency should publish all reports, including the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful.
- The panel recommends the agency offers all available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders, including students and employers.

The Register Committee said:

- While the Register Committee acknowledged AQU's efforts to improve the readability and accessibility of reports for its target audience the Committee concluded that the fag has only been partially addressed, since AQU still does not publish all reports. The Committee was

thus unable to concur with the review panel's conclusion of (substantially) compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 2.6.

With regard to the first recommendation, as explained in the [Follow-up report delivered to ENQA in June 2019](#), since January 2019 AQU Catalunya has been publishing all reports, both for positive and negative decisions. In the case of negative reports on the validation process prior to the implementation of the degree programme, these are also published but with an initial page warning that the degree programme in question will not be taught.

All the reports on the assessments carried out by AQU Catalunya are published on the AQU Catalunya EUC Informes website (<https://estudis.aqu.cat/informes/Web/Inici>). In the case of [micro-credential accreditation reports](#), these are temporarily being published on the corporate website until the platform is adapted.

It should be noted that AQU Catalunya was one of the agencies that actively participated in the project promoted by EQAR that created the [DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Reports](#) (2018-2020) and we are currently contributing to the continuation of this project, [DEQAR CONNECT](#). So far, AQU Catalunya has been automatically publishing validation reports, accreditation reports, modification reports and institutional accreditation reports in DEQAR, with a total of 3,159 reports published¹⁷.

Regarding the second recommendation, and in line with AQU Catalunya's Strategic Plan 2019-2022, the Agency has improved the EUC studies portal (<https://estudis.aqu.cat/euc/en/Comu/Inici#>) in order to adapt it to the information needs of its users.

Apart from the visual and technological improvement, another important new feature is that the degree programme search engine makes it possible to filter and sort the results by educational level, field and sub-field of knowledge and university, as well as by level of excellence of the programme and ownership of the centre (public or private). For each degree programme there is a separate file containing the results of the review, links to the reports, basic information and the main indicators.

9. Enhancement Standard

9.1. ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

In the last external review, the panel made a suggestion¹⁸ in regard to this standard:

¹⁷ Source: DEQAR (2/11/2021).

¹⁸ The ENQA Board turned the panel's recommendation into a suggestion in the meeting of 26 February 2018.

- The panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.

In the 2019 [follow-up report](#), the Agency explained that it would maintain the type of reporting that had been carried out up to that point.

In the last two years, AQU Catalunya has worked on improving the approach to these reports, as well as on giving a clearer structure to the types of reports that the Agency produces and which it considers to fall within the framework of what is expected in terms of compliance with this standard.

Unlike in the last review, AQU Catalunya does not take into account in this standard the meta-evaluation reports of the assessment processes, because they are considered to focus on the continuous improvement of the assessment processes ([see compliance with ESG 3.6.](#)); the Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Report, as it is a document prepared for accountability purposes; indicator databases, as they do not incorporate any analysis; or dissemination actions (mainly [conferences and workshops](#)).

However, what are interpreted as thematic analyses are the reports that AQU Catalunya schedules annually as part of its Action Plan, of which there are two different types:

- Reports from external quality assurance processes.
- Thematic studies.

The aim of these reports is to be transparent with regard to the results of the assessments and to generate knowledge that can be used to improve university processes and public policies. In order to increase the dissemination of the results of these reports, their presentation is usually accompanied by a briefing or discussion session (face-to-face or virtual) on the report in question.

The table below shows the thematic analysis reports that have been published, and it can be seen that this activity has doubled in the last two years:

Table 8. Thematic reports published

	2018	2019	2020	2021 ¹⁹
REPORTS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES				
Programmes				
Cross-sectional reports		2		1

¹⁹ Reports expected to be published by December 2021.

	Comparative reports		1	4
Centres				
	IQAS			1*
Teaching staff				
	Gender perspective		1	
	Teacher profile	1		1*
Others				
	Doctoral programme review process			1*
	Performance of virtual visits during the pandemic			1*
THEMATIC STUDIES				
	Employment outcomes	1	3	2
	Employers' opinion	3	4	6
	Satisfaction of recent graduates	1		2
	Via Universitaria		1	
TOTAL		7	6	11

* Pending publication

Reports from external quality assurance processes:

This area includes the reports that are drawn up on the basis of the results of the external review processes carried out by AQU Catalunya and, if deemed appropriate, they are supplemented with quantitative data obtained from the surveys carried out by the Agency or from other official sources. These reports are structured by area: [Degree programmes](#), [Centres](#), [Teaching Staff](#) and [others](#).

Regarding degree programmes, AQU Catalunya produces two types of report:

- [Cross-sectional reports](#), which analyse the status of the same type of degree taught in different higher education centres in Catalonia. However, until 2020, these reports only considered the information used in the review processes, while from 2020 onwards, and as per the ENQA panel recommendation, the quantitative data available to AQU Catalunya from other studies will be included.
- [Comparative reports at state level](#). Since 2020, some agencies in Spain²⁰ have been working to create reports based on the AQU Catalunya [employer opinion surveys](#) and

²⁰ Agencia Andaluza del Conocimiento, Dirección de Evaluación y Acreditación, Agencia Canaria de Calidad Universitaria y Evaluación Educativa, Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León, Agencia de Calidad y Prospectiva Universitària de Aragón, Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Galicia, Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya,

incorporating the data provided by all the agencies on the results of their review processes. The aim is to provide a general overview in a national context and to propose specific areas for improvement in these degrees, with the help of experts in each field.

- Others. This includes non-periodic reports of relevance to the Catalan Higher Education System, for example, the analysis of the functioning of virtual visits during the pandemic period.

With regard to university centres, in 2021 AQU Catalunya analysed the [IQAS Certification](#) process which has been in place since 2018. This study analyses the results obtained so far in this evaluation process in Catalonia in terms of the different aspects evaluated, the main requirements made and the good practices that have been detected.

Although the assessment of teaching staff is an activity that is outside the scope of this review, it is worth mentioning that two studies were carried out by AQU Catalunya during this five-year period: the report [Profiles of Tenure-track lecturers \(2013-2017\)](#), which analysed the profile of lecturers who obtained favourable assessments in order to guide future applicants; and the report [Research Periods and Gender 2017-2019](#), published in 2020, which analysed the existence of any gender differences in the assessment results; furthermore, the profile of associate teaching staff is currently being finalised.

Thematic studies

This section includes studies on thematic areas of analysis that are of particular interest to higher education institutions in Catalonia. Specifically:

- **Employment outcomes:** this study has been carried out every three years for 20 years and analyses the employment rate, the quality of employment and the quality of the training received three years after graduation. In 2020, AQU Catalunya carried out a new edition of the survey of [Bachelor's Degrees](#), [Arts Higher Education programmes](#), [Master's](#) and [Doctorate](#) courses, and in this edition there is a special report on [the impact of gender on employment outcomes 20 years](#) after graduation.
- **Employers' opinion:** during this five-year period, AQU Catalunya has completed the second edition of this project (2017-2019), which provides the higher education system with information that enables those responsible for degree programmes to assess whether it is necessary to adjust the training provided to the needs of the labour market. In this second edition, 15 reports were produced for the following degree programmes: [Pharmacy](#), [Public Administration](#), [Communication](#), [Tourism](#), [Economics](#)

[and Business](#), [Humanities](#), [Biosciences](#), [Design](#), [Psychology](#), [Information and Communication Technologies](#), [Construction](#), [Medicine](#), [Nursing](#), [Teaching](#) and [Industrial Technologies](#). In addition to the quantitative analysis of the survey, these studies also include basic data on the degree programmes and data from other studies coordinated by AQU Catalunya, such as job satisfaction and employment outcomes. Furthermore, through workshops with academics, students and professionals in the field of the degree, conclusions are drawn up to close the report. This study was carried out in collaboration with the 12 Catalan universities, 24 professional associations and with special funding from the “la Caixa” Banking Foundation.

- **[Satisfaction of recent graduates](#)**: During this five-year period, this study has continued to be carried out on an annual basis, with the aim of finding out the satisfaction of recent graduates in relation to the degree course they have just completed. In 2019, for the first time, graduates of arts higher education programmes were included. The survey provides common indicators for the improvement of teaching in relation to the aspects of satisfaction with teaching-learning, services and facilities, personal impact on the student, etc. Reports are published every three years, considering the results of three consecutive years of the survey. In 2018, the [first report on the satisfaction of bachelor’s degree graduates](#) was produced, and in 2021 a new report for bachelor’s degrees and the first one for master’s degrees²¹ have been produced.
- **[Via Universitària](#)**. This is an initiative of the [Vives Network of universities](#) to find out the profile of university students, their study conditions and their satisfaction with their university and its teaching. During this five-year period, AQU Catalunya was responsible for the technical management of the second edition of the study (2017-2019) and the third edition (2020-2022). In this latest edition, a section has been added to find out the impact of COVID on students’ satisfaction with the teaching-learning process and on their living conditions.

As regards thematic analyses, AQU Catalunya is carrying out a project through university centres to identify good teaching practices in relation to the development of employability skills. The aim is to generate knowledge on the teaching practices of the centres that have a positive impact on the employability of university students, to create a repository of teaching resources to be made available to the centres during the first semester of 2022, and to include the results in the employers’ study. The possibility of creating good practice awards under this programme will be considered.

²¹ Pending publication at the time of writing.

PART 4. ESG IN THE NEW ACTIVITIES

10. New external review activities

Over the last two years, AQU Catalunya has begun two new activities. Ex-ante accreditation of degrees through the European Approach and ex-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes (Micro-credential).

As for the first of these review processes, it applies to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions in two or more states.

The second process applies to short programmes with the following characteristics:

- At levels 2 and 3 under the [Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework](#), and at levels 4 and 5 of the [National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications](#).
- Programmes linked to the [Catalan Public Employment Service's Catalogue of Training in Specialised Fields](#).
- Credit load: between 4 and 30 ECTS credits.
- ECTS credits earned are recognisable in official qualifications.
- Provider: Catalan universities.
- They are in line with labour market needs.
- Targeted group: non-traditional students.

10.1. ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

European Approach

The [Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programme accreditations using the European Approach framework](#) and the [Guide to ex-ante accreditation of Joint Programmes using the European Approach](#) explain how AQU Catalunya takes into account the European Approach protocol in its review methodology. This information is also available [on the AQU Catalunya website](#).

[Annex 7](#) contains a graphic representation of how ESG Part 1 is taken into account in the review methodologies. The correspondence of the methodology developed with the European Approach can be found in [Annex 8](#).

Short Learning Programmes/Micro-credentials

In the case of Short Learning Programmes/micro-credentials, the correspondence of the standards can be found in the guide [Ex-ante Accreditation of Short Learning Programmes](#).

[Annex 7](#) presents the relationship between ESG Part 1 and the methodology designed for the assessment of Short Learning Programmes.

10.2. ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

European Approach

In this case, the design of the methodology is based on the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#). Specifically, AQU Catalunya has created the documents [Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programme accreditations using the European Approach framework](#) and the [Guide to ex-ante accreditation of Joint Programmes using the European Approach](#). During the process of adapting the methodology to the Catalan context, the opinion of the stakeholders was sought through the [Vice-Rectors Committee](#) and the [QA Units Committee](#), as well as the [Institutional and Programme Review Commission](#), which was the commission that finally approved the methodology.

Short Learning Programmes/Micro-credentials

For the creation of the methodology for the ex-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes, the [Guide to the ex-ante accreditation of recognised university degree programmes](#) was taken as a reference and adapted taking into account the needs of the Catalan Government and the [Public Employment Service of Catalonia \(SOC\)](#). In addition, in the case of the 2020 assessment, the opinion of [Barcelona Digital Talent](#) was also taken into account as it is one of the most relevant employers. As in all methodology development processes, this process also took into account the opinion of the universities through the [Vice-Rectors Committee](#) and the [QA Units Committee](#), and also included the opinion of the [Institutional and Programme Review Commission](#), which was the committee that finally approved the methodology.

10.3. ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

European Approach

The [Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programme accreditations using the European Approach framework](#) describe the ex-ante and ex-post process of accreditation according to this methodology. The differences between this process and the ex-ante accreditation and accreditation of degree programmes carried out by AQU Catalunya are as follows:

- The language used in documents pertaining to the assessment process is English.
- An external visit is compulsory for all assessment processes, whether are ex-ante accreditation or accreditation processes.
- The external assessment committee must have at least five members, from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the programme. Members should include a student, a professional and a methodological expert.

- Cooperation between external quality agencies of the different countries involved is highly recommended to ensure that there are no problems with the official recognition of qualifications in the different states.
- The validity of the accreditation is six years for all qualifications.

The panel produces a report containing the relevant evidence, analysis and conclusions for each of the standards assessed, in addition to which it must also include recommendations for improving the programme. The panel must also make a recommendation on the final decision for the programme. The conclusions and recommendations must consider the different characteristics of the joint programme. The higher education institution being assessed should also be given a draft copy of the assessment report so it has the opportunity to make comments and request the correction of any factual errors. In the event of disagreement, institutions can submit appeals to the Appeals Committee (see [ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals](#)).

AQU Catalunya has issued two accreditation reports:

- [University Master's Degree in Global Challenges for Sustainability](#) (master's degree from a European University), University of Barcelona, Trinity College Dublin, University of Utrecht, Eötvös Loránd University, University of Montpellier.
- [Master in Transfusion Medicine and Cellular and Tissue Therapies](#), coordinated by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

In this case, the monitoring process is the same as for recognised university degrees. If the relevant conditions are met, AQU Catalunya carries out a monitoring process three years after approval.

When a joint programme is accredited, it is awarded with AQU Catalunya ex-ante accreditation label.

Short Learning Programmes/Micro-credentials

Currently, only short learning programmes within the strategic framework of the Catalan Government and Research can be assessed.

The assessment process consists of a prior evaluation by an ad hoc committee, which submits a proposal for an assessment report to the specific assessment committee of the corresponding area of the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee.

The Specific Committees accredited the ex-ante proposal in accordance with the approved methodology. The specific committees are made up of academics, professionals and students. In this case, the institution has the right to review the draft report issued by the Committee in order to propose factual changes. In the event of disagreement, institutions can submit appeals to the Appeals Committee (see [ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals](#)).

In the case of accreditation with conditions, a monitoring report must be submitted to AQU Catalunya after three years. If there are no conditions attached to the accreditation, ex-post accreditation of the qualification must be given six years after the assessment.

In 2020, AQU Catalunya assessed 33 proposals from Catalan universities, grouped into seven different types of programmes:

Table 9. Universities offering Micro-credentials

	UAB	UdG	UdL	UOC	UPC	UPF	URL	URV	UVic-UCC
Java Back End Web Developer	X					X	X		
Open Source Back End Web Developer	X						X		X
Front End Developer	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Android Mobile Developer	X		X	X			X	X	X
Consultor CRM	X	X			X				
Cloud Deployer	X			X	X	X	X		
Data Scientist	X	X		X		X	X		
TOTAL	7	2	2	4	3	4	6	2	3

The assessment reports can be found via [this link](#).

10.4. ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

The experts for these new review activities have been selected from [AQU Catalunya's pool of reviewers](#), in accordance with procedure S.02 Management of experts.

The experts that have been participated in the review processes in 2021 were the following:

Table 10. External experts 2021 in the new review activities

	Catalan system	External Catalan system	Total
European Approach	2	10	12
SLP/Microcredentials	2	2	4
TOTAL	4	12	16

All of them have been trained before the review (3 training sessions).

For external experts, through their acceptance of the Commitment to comply with AQU Catalunya's principles of action, its values, Code of Ethics and Policy for quality and

information security, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area available on the reviewer's database extranet that reviewers receive together with a review assignment.

10.5. ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

For all of AQU Catalunya's external review processes, whether or not they include the possibility of making formal decisions as a result of the process, there exists a review guide that describes the review procedures, dimensions and criteria. The decisions of AQU Catalunya's review commissions and committees are evidence-based.

A key indication that the criteria for outcomes are explicit, understood and consistently applied is the low number of appeals that were submitted to the Appeals Committee (see [ESG 2.7. Complaints and appeals](#)). None of the new activities have resulted in appeals regarding the review process being brought before the Appeals Committee.

10.6. ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

All the reports on the assessments carried out by AQU Catalunya, including European Approach, are published on the AQU Catalunya EUC Informes website (<https://estudis.aqu.cat/informes/Web/Inici>). In the case of [micro-credential accreditation reports](#), these are temporarily being published on the corporate website until the platform is adapted.

AQU Catalunya is working to publish these new review activities reports to [DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Reports](#).

10.7. ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

Persons or institutions who disagree with the outcome of a review may apply an appeal with the Appeals Committee following the [procedure publish in our website](#) or complaint described in internal procedure S.04.01. AQU Catalunya has an open channel on the website for receiving complaints and queries (called the [Help Desk](#)). This Help Desk is mainly used by students and teachers.

During the period in question, AQU Catalunya has not received any appeal or complaint referring to the review of European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes and Short Learning Programmes.

For more information, see [ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals in this report](#).

PART 5. SWOT ANALYSIS

This SWOT analysis was carried out as part of the process of drawing up the [AQU Catalunya Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#). The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was created using the strategic tool CAME (Correct, Address, Maintain and Exploit), which was the basis of the Strategic Plan. The SWOT and CAME are described below and can be found in [Annex 9](#).

Strengths	Weaknesses
Rigour and technical independence in the exercise of duties	Perception of excessive bureaucratisation and that there is a need for further simplification and streamlining of assessment processes
Transparency and ease of access to information on activities and their results	Restrictive budget that limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the ability to provide remuneration equal to that of experts in other equivalent agencies and the appointment of international experts ✓ alignment of the number of staff with the volume of activity ✓ the issuing of annual calls for teaching staff assessment ✓ adherence to and potential shortening of assessment deadlines
Trained expert staff who feel committed to the activity they carry out	Continuous training for experts needs to be strengthened
Orientation towards continuous improvement in the activities and services offered	Internal and external exchange of in-house staff to facilitate better adaptation to change
Ability to innovate and promote new projects in its areas of expertise	Lack of strategy for positioning the Agency internationally
Reviewers of proven and recognised scientific and academic quality.	Lack of knowledge of university students, or future students, about the results of the accreditation processes carried out by AQU Catalunya
	Lack of knowledge about the quality mechanisms and criteria used by AQU on university teaching staff assessments.

Opportunities

Threats

<p>National and international standing. Rigorous agency working to quality standards (recognised by ENQA, EQAR and INQAAHE) and experienced in participating in international projects and assessments</p>	<p>Dependence on laws and even on software applications of the State Government that hinder the design of more flexible quality assurance models oriented towards continuous improvement</p>
<p>Raising awareness of the Catalan Higher Education System, especially the future student body, of the value (cost/benefit) of the quality assessment processes and of having qualified information on university degree programmes</p>	<p>Tendency towards increased centralisation in the distribution of powers between the State Government and the autonomous regions</p>
<p>Introduction of e-Government</p>	<p>Minor impact on decision-making that affects the Catalan and Spanish Higher Education System</p>
<p>Growing interest in the data collected, standardised and managed by AQU Catalunya</p>	<p>Restriction of staff contracts by state and regional regulations and activation of the labour market to attract staff</p>
	<p>Competition among Spanish agencies for the recruitment and selection of academic experts from the Spanish university system to participate in review processes</p>
	<p>Non-recognition of the review activities of AQU Catalunya's contracted teaching staff by other state agencies</p>
	<p>Low involvement of the university student body in quality assurance</p>
	<p>Independence is affected by pressure from universities with regard to the criteria for quality assessment or the composition of expert committees.</p>

PART 6. CONCLUSIONS

This section describes a list of the elements that have been detected in this assessment process and which will also be taken into account in the preparation of the next SWOT analysis planned for 2022, prior to drawing up the Strategic Plan 2023-2026. The following are the most relevant conclusions:

Although it has not undergone any structural changes in the last five years, the recent approval by the Ministry of Universities of Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September establishing the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance will require extra efforts to adapt external assessment activities (methodology and computer applications) to the regulatory requirements and deadlines that have been set by the Ministry and which also affect universities. In collaboration with other REACU agencies, AQU Catalunya is currently analysing the impact of the Royal Decree on its activities and preparing to manage the change in accordance with its quality management system. This new Royal Decree apparently hinders the design of more flexible quality assurance models oriented towards continuous improvement.

It should be noted that AQU Catalunya has undergone a significant technological transformation that has enabled it to move from paper-based and face-to-face processes to electronic and virtual ones. This change was essentially what enabled it to adapt immediately to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to work normally from day one.

Over these five years, the Agency has forged new alliances with entities for the purpose of collaborating both in review projects and in studies whose results lead to an improvement of the higher education system in Catalonia. Other partnerships have also been strengthened with several state agencies, sharing common projects and interests that have added to the richness of the analyses carried out.

In terms of the progress made since the last external review, AQU Catalunya has worked over this period to respond to the requirements for improvement, satisfactorily completing 87% of the actions and reinforcing all the review standards where there was room for improvement.

Specifically, AQU Catalunya's main activity over the last five years has been the external review of programmes, although a shift towards institutional accreditation is already in sight. A relevant development of the assessment activity is that the government is using the results of the assessment processes for adopting decision on the authorisation of programmes.

With regard to financial resources, although AQU Catalunya has been provided with the necessary funding to carry out its activities, the Contract Programme agreement with the Catalan Government – which should make it possible to move from annual to four-year financial management, with the fulfilment of objectives linked to the Strategic Plan – has

not yet been finalised. In the case of human resources, it is worth highlighting the orientation of the staff training plan towards skill development and the demand for the change from temporary to permanent contracts, in order to improve the stability of the workforce (ESG 3.5.).

In terms of external experts, the number of people collaborating with AQU Catalunya continues to grow, with the majority of them external to the Catalan Higher Education System. In 2021, after several attempts, a partnership agreement is about to be signed with the European Students Union to include international students in AQU Catalunya's assessment processes. Also in this area, another noteworthy measure is the training provided to develop assessment skills and to update the knowledge of experts. Specifically, almost 700 people have been trained in this five-year period (ESG 2.4.).

The Appeals Committee has taken on new members from outside the Catalan Higher Education System, and in this period has dealt with 24 appeals related to the external review of degrees, which is less than 2% of the reviews carried out (ESG 2.7.).

Regarding the requirements that were only partially assessed in the previous review, AQU Catalunya has responded to all of them.

In terms of independence, AQU Catalunya has clearly separated the roles of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission and its specific commissions, as the decision-making bodies for the reviews, from those of the external review committees, which carry out the visit. Furthermore, no complaints have been received alleging a lack of independence. On the contrary, one of AQU Catalunya's strengths is considered to be its rigour and technical independence in the exercise of its functions (ESG 3.5.).

In all external review processes included in the ESG, AQU Catalunya takes into account the standards in part 1. To reinforce the comments received, in the case of standard 1.3, the student report was designed and has been piloted in the accreditation process in two universities, it has been incorporated into the institutional accreditation methodology and all methodologies have been revised to make compliance with standard 1.4 clearer. (ESG 2.1.).

AQU Catalunya publishes all assessment reports, both for positive and negative decisions. The reports are public on the AQU Catalunya platform and those that have been automated on the DEQAR platform are being made public. In addition, it has continued to work to provide clear and integrated information to prospective students through the University Studies of Catalonia (EUC) portal (ESG. 2.6.).

As a standard for improvement, AQU Catalunya presented the progress it has made in the field of thematic analysis. During this period, the Agency has defined what it considers to be thematic analysis, and in the last two years it has doubled the number of reports produced, with a total of almost 40, based on external quality assessment processes and studies of specific areas relevant to the Catalan Higher Education System. In this area, it is also worth

highlighting the project to identify good teaching practices in relation to the development of employability skills, which will involve the creation of a repository of teaching resources to be made available to universities (ESG 3.4.).

During this period, AQU Catalunya began two new activities: ex-ante accreditation through the European Approach and ex-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes. Both activities are in accordance with the content of the following ESG: [ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts](#); [ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting](#) and [ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals](#).

As far as the differential elements are concerned, in the case of the European Approach, the methodology developed is based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and, in the case of Micro-credentials, on ex-ante accreditation. In both cases, part 1 of the ESG has been considered, and the former has been applied in two Masters, one of which was part of a European University Initiative, while the latter has been applied in 33 proposals grouped into seven different types of programmes. No complaints or appeals have been received in relation to either process.

In summary, the work carried out during this five-year period demonstrates that AQU Catalunya is a consolidated and rigorous external review agency which has a solidly integrated quality management and information security system, is alert to developments in its field and adapts them to its own context, such as the launch of two new review activities (European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and Micro-credentials) and recognition by the World Federation for Medical Education.

ANNEX 1: DRAFTING OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR APPROVAL OF THE REPORT

[Standing Committee of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya](#)

SELF-ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Jaume Valls, director of AQU Catalunya and president of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (from 1 November 2021)

Martí Casadesús, director of AQU Catalunya and chair of the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee (until 31 October 2021)

Joaquim Salvi, member of the AQU Catalunya Governing Board and Rector of the University of Girona

Frederic Marimon, vice-rector for Quality at the International University of Catalonia

Carme Sala, head of the Technical Quality Unit at the University of Lleida

Pau Maza, Student Committee

Teresa Sánchez, member of the Advisory Committee and lecturer at the School of Industrial Engineering of the Polytechnic University of Madrid

Maria Giné, secretary of AQU Catalunya and of the Governing Council, and secretary of the Self-assessment committee

DRAFTING COMMITTEE

Martí Casadesús, director of AQU Catalunya and president of the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee

Maria Giné, secretary of AQU Catalunya and of the Governing Council

Esther Huertas, head of the Quality Assurance Department

Núria Comet, Project and Internal Quality coordinator

ANNEX 2: TABLE OF CONTENTS, ACTION PLAN 2022

The [Action Plan 2022](#) was approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board in July 2021 and will start on 1 January 2022.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING HIGHER EDUCATION

ACTION AREA I. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY

- A. Institutional assessment
- B. Assessment of university degrees
- C. Support for the internationalisation of the Catalan Higher Education System
- E. Procedural improvements
- D. Appeals and review reports

ACTION AREA II. TEACHING STAFF QUALITY

- A. Assessment of teaching staff prior to university selection processes
- B. Assessment of merits
- C. Ruling on appeals

ACTION AREA III. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

- A. Surveys and indicators of the Catalan Higher Education System
- B. Studies and Reports

2. COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY

ACTION AREA III. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

- C. Knowledge transfer

ACTION AREA V. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- C. Communication tools

3. COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

ACTION AREA V. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- A. Strategic management

ACTION AREA VI. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

- A. Accountability, transparency and modernisation
- B. Internal management
- C. Information and Communication Technologies
- D. General services

4. COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES

ACTION AREA V. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- B. External relations

ACTION AREA IV. INTERNATIONALISATION

- A. International projects
- B. International assessments and exchanges

5. COMMITMENT TO THE WORKPLACE

ACTION AREA VI. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

- B. Internal management

ANNEX 3: RESULTS OF ESG REVIEWS

According to the most recent external review coordinated by ENQA (2017), AQU Catalunya's level of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance was as follows:

Table 11. Result of 2017 assessment

Standard	ENQA Review 2017	EQAR Review 2017
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	Substantially compliant	Compliant
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	Substantially compliant	Compliant
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	Fully compliant	Compliant
ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS	Substantially compliant	Compliant
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES	Fully compliant	Compliant
ESG 2.6 REPORTING	Substantially compliant	Partially compliant
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	Fully compliant	Compliant
3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	Substantially compliant	Compliant
3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS	Fully compliant	Compliant
3.3 INDEPENDENCE	Substantially compliant	Partially compliant
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Substantially compliant	Compliant
3.5 RESOURCES	Substantially compliant	Compliant
3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT	Fully compliant	Compliant
3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES	Fully compliant	Compliant

ANNEX 4: ACTION PLAN 2019-2022

The following is a summary of the Action Plan that resulted from the 2017 ESG compliance review.

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State
						2019	2020	2021	2022	
2.1.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency to reflect on how the concept of student-centred learning may become a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).	1	AQU Catalunya's Student Advisory Committee is designing the "students report" that will be an evidence for the institutional report assessment.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X	X	X		Done
2.1.	R		2	Once the "students report" is approved, AQU Catalunya will review all the guidebooks to introduce it.	Head Quality Assessment Department		X	X		Done
2.1.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency integrates student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4) more consistently into the different evaluation procedures.	3	AQU Catalunya will review the guidebooks to include an explanation and an evidence table to make it clearer.	Head Quality Assessment Department		X			Done

2.2.	S	<p>ENQA Supplementary recommendation according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose.</p>	4	<p>The recommendation can not be fulfilled.</p>		Closed	
2.3.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.</p>	5	<p>To strengthen the follow up process, AQU continues the monitoring process of the VSMA Framework (that guarantees a proper monitoring both at the institutional level —Faculty— and at the degree programme level); and besides AQU is consolidating in 2019 the Certification programme for IQAs Implementation, that certifies that the system has been implemented and is operative in the faculty responsible for running the programmes covered by the IQAS and that it is appropriate for the programme’s quality assurance.</p>	<p>Head Quality Assessment Department</p>	<p>X</p>	Done

2.4.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures.	6	Sign a Memorandum of understanding between ESU and AQU Catalunya concerning student experts participation in AQU's quality assurance external evaluations.	AQU's secretary	X	X	X	Done
2.4.	R		7	Taking into account the typology of the external visits to be carried out in accordance with the annual plan, AQU Catalunya will increase the number of the experts outside from Catalunya in the following years.	Head Quality Assessment Department			X	Done
2.4.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG	8	Elaborate an experts training plan in order to keep them up-to-date: A- Strengthen the training of the panel secretaries B- Ensure that all experts have received updated training in a maximum of 5 years. C- Update the webpage of Training of external experts, as a support tool and to inform them of the most relevant changes in the methodology.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X	X		Done

			D- Use of the surveys to figure out the lacking of training in the areas of quality assurance.				
2.5.	ENQA strength points: the result of the panel assessment “Fully compliant”	9	Maintain procedures, especially: A- Design guidebooks with clear information about the scope of the review and the criteria being used B- To publish the methodology at the appropriate time in different languages C- To train the experts properly through workshops, training sessions, webinars, etc.	Head Quality Assessment Department			Done
2.5.		10	Finish the meta-evaluation report of the Accreditation process 2014-2017, and elaborate in 2022 the next one.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X	X	Ongoing
2.5.		11	Include in the next AQU Catalunya self-Assessment report, if relevant: A- During the external review process, the universities have the opportunity to correct factual errors in the external reviews reports B- The elaboration of meta-evaluations reports contribute to ensuring the consistency of judgments in the evaluation process.	AQU's secretary		X	Done

2.6.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends the agency should publish all reports, including the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful.</p> <p>EQAR: While the Register Committee acknowledged AQU's efforts to improve the readability and accessibility of reports for its target audience the Committee concluded that the fag has only been partially addressed, since AQU still does not publish all reports. The Committee was thus unable to concur with the review panel's conclusion of (substantially) compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 2.6.</p>	12	<p>AQU Catalunya publish, at EUCInformes website (estudis.aqu.cat/informes), the non-positive ex-ante accreditation reports issued from January 2019, with a prior warning that will explain that the program does not exist. So, all the reports issued by AQU Catalunya are public.</p>	AQU's secretary	X	Done
2.6.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends the agency offers all available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders, including students and employers.</p>	13	<p>To include in the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 AQU Catalunya commitment with the integration of data.</p>	Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department	X	Done

2.7.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members.</p>	14	<p>Increase the composition of the Appeals Committee with two new non-Catalan members.</p>	Legal advisor	X	Done
3.1.	S	<p>ENQA Suggestion according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation.</p>	15	<p>The Governing Board approved in 2018 the Catalogue of services. This Catalogue gather the principles, the services and commitments of AQU Catalunya. This document briefly explains the services in the fields of: Programme and institutional review, Quality assurance of teaching staff in higher education, knowledge generation, and Internationalization. The Catalogue of services is available at the webpage of AQU Catalunya.</p>	AQU's secretary		Done

3.1.	R	<p>EQAR: The Register Committee concurred with the panel that such consultancy activities should be clearly separated from external QA activities, in particular when those activities are carried out for the same higher education institution. The Committee drew AQU's attention to the guiding principles set out in Annex 5 to the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG and underlined that AQU is expected to make a substantive change report should it resume the same or similar consultancy-type activities offered to higher education institutions.</p>	16	<p>To elaborate and approve The Catalogue of services. This Catalogue has to gather the principles, the services and commitments of AQU Catalunya.</p>	AQU's secretary	Done
3.3.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency considers the implications of the close involvement of active HEI representatives in the work of the agency. In particular the impact upon the independence compared to the involvement of more neutral but equally competent stakeholders from other jurisdictions.</p>	17	<p>The recommendation can not be fulfilled.</p>		Closed

3.3.	<p>R</p> <p>ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency takes steps to fully separate the roles of the definition and monitoring of procedures on the one hand, and the implementation of those procedures on the other hand.</p> <p>EQAR: The Register Committee noted the agency's clarifications. While it found that the flag on the independence of the Governing Board was largely addressed, the Committee underlined the concerns of the panel with regard to the overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies. The Committee therefore could not follow the panel's conclusion of compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 3.3.</p>	18	<p>Not appoint any president or member of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) among the members of the technical committees.</p>		<p>Head Quality Assessment Department</p>	X	Done
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3.4.	S	<p>ENQA Suggestion according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.</p>	19	<p>Safeguard and improve quality of Catalan Higher Education System, AQU Catalunya will maintain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A- The publication of Cross-sectional reports (minimum one each year) B- The universities report, addressed to the rectors (one per university/every three years) C- The Centers reports (private reports) D- The publication of the results from surveys (graduate employment outcomes, employers survey, Bachelor and Master's graduate satisfaction survey) F- The publication of comparative data in euc.estudis.cat/dades G- The publication of meta-evaluation reports 	<p>Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department and Head Quality Assessment Department</p>	Done
3.5.	R	<p>ENQA: The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term.</p>	20	<p>Establish the Contract Programme with the Catalan Administration. This agreement will balance the volume of activities with the financial and human resources. This action is included in the Strategic Plan 2019-2022.</p>	<p>AQU's secretary</p>	<p>X Pending action</p>

3.5.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.	21	In the Annual Action Plan, AQU Catalunya quantifies the number of activities, and its volume, that can be done by the staff during the year.	AQU's secretary	X	Done
3.5.	R		22	Once the Contract Programme is approved, to distribute the activities in a four year term.	AQU's secretary		X Pending action
3.5.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.	23	Introduce the new Training programme skills-based.	Head of Administration	X	Done
3.5.	R		24	Establish the strategic staff training yearly.	Internal Coordination Committee	X	Done
3.5.	R		25	Include in the next AQU Catalunya self-Assessment report, if relevant, a better explanation of the Training programme.	AQU's secretary		X Done

ANNEX 5: LIST OF TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR AQU CATALUNYA STAFF 2020

Training and knowledge management for the achievement of personal competencies in quality assurance - Training programme 2020

Strengthen training in institutional accreditation

Competence	Training activity carried out	No. of attendees
Quality Management	Integrated Quality Management	1
	The EFQM Model in the challenges of university management	3
	Internal Audit	1
	Training for reviewers in Agenda 2030 - SDG certification	3
	Understanding the Language and Intention of Accreditation Standards	1
Institutional accreditation	Quality Assurance and Management in Higher Education	1
	Quality Assurance in Higher Education: European Challenges and perspectives	1
	The promotion of active learning methodologies in the Basque University System	2
	Lifelong higher education: the cases of France, Finland and Germany	3
	Training for the accreditation of medical degrees according to WFME criteria	3

Competence	Training activity carried out	No. of attendees
Oral and written communication	Universities building a better Europe	1
	ImpEA training	3
	What are industrial doctorates?	24
	The Gender Perspective in University Teaching	3
	Virtual writing and style	1
	Report writing in the framework of the certification of internal quality assurance system	8
	The secrets of written communication	1
	Communication	1

Strengthen training in data, indicators, statistical language and associated tools

Competence	Training activity carried out	No. of attendees
Web tools	Presentation of the new EUC-Basic portal	32
	Presentation of the new EUC-Technical portal	9
ICT Tools	Microsoft Forms	1
	Microsoft Teams	1

Competence	Training activity carried out	No. of attendees
	Power BI Essential Training	1
	Power BI: Advanced Training	1
	AZ-900 Microsoft Azure Fundamentals	2
	AZ-500 Microsoft Azure Security Technologies	2
Statistical language	Introduction to R	1
	Excel applied to statistical data analysis	1
	Introduction to Python: Absolute Beginner	1
Data	Open Data in the education of the new generations	2
	Analysing Comparative Longitudinal Survey Data Using Multilevel Models	1
	Advanced search, monitoring and validation of Information on the Internet	5
	Machine learning for social sciences	1
	Conference on the Catalan Government's data governance model	1

Other competences

Competence	Training activity carried out	No. of attendees
People management - Teamwork	Difficult Interactions	1
	Leadership and Team Management	3
	Skills assessment	10
	World Café training	8
	Stress Management	1
	Techniques and web tools for project management	2
English language	English language courses	16
	English language improvement courses	11
Tools - Use of online information	Electronic processing	2
	3rd Conference in the Trends in Digital Society Series	1
	RACO Journals webinar. Quality and visibility of journals	7
	Discovering the Web of Science and learning how to search by keyword	2
	From paper to digital administration	10

ANNEX 6: LIST OF TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR EXPERTS

Introduction

All the quality assurance processes conducted by AQU are carried out with the involvement of experts, as indicated in *ESG 2.4: External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s). In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts,*

- *they are carefully selected;*
- *have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;*
- *are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing*

This document aims to reflect all the activities that are undertaken to ensure that the experts involved in the quality assurance processes have the appropriate skills and knowledge.

Objectives of the training of experts

AQU wants to ensure that reviewers have a good understanding of the assessment criteria as well as the procedures themselves. To achieve this, it first carefully selects experts and then trains them on a regular basis in different stages.

The initial training must be completed before participating in a review or in a commission or committee. The Agency ensures that its experts have suitable knowledge of processes, methodologies, legislative changes and innovations through seminars, communications, and specific training sessions.

Process

The process for ensuring the expertise of reviewers consists of the following stages:

Stage 1: Selection of experts

AQU selects experts from its database who meet the prerequisites defined in the Reviewer Profile (1.33 Profiles and requirements for taking part in teaching staff, institutional and appeal assessment processes).

Stage 2: Initial training

All persons who act as AQU reviewers must take part in an initial training session corresponding to the process in which they will participate, to familiarise them with general aspects such as the ESG, legal framework, quality and information security policy, assessment tools and code of ethics.



Stage 3: Follow-up and support

AQU has several tools to support its experts. Particularly during their first few reviews, the expert will be supported by an AQU Catalunya technician who will answer any queries.

Stage 4: Specific and update training

AQU has an annual programme of seminars and workshops to ensure that experts keep their knowledge up to date. Sessions on updates to methodologies, criteria, etc. are also held.

Initial training

Type of training INITIAL	Target	Content of the training	Training material	Learning outcomes/skills	Trainer Profile
Generic training	All reviewers	<p>Knowledge of the ESG</p> <p>Knowledge of the national framework</p> <p>Code of ethics</p> <p>Internal management procedure - remuneration</p> <p>Information security</p>	Introduction	The setting in which the review may be carried out.	AQU staff with QA experience.
Programme training - Validation - Monitoring - Modification	Members of the specific assessment committees	<p>Knowledge of standards and criteria</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Review guide</p> <p>Video: YouTube channel</p>	<p>Correct application of criteria.</p> <p>Knowing how to make decisions.</p>	AQU staff with QA experience.
Programme training – accreditation of bachelor’s and master’s degrees	Members of the specific assessment committees accrediting bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes	<p>Knowledge of standards and criteria</p> <p>Knowledge of the process</p> <p>The role of each member</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Review guide</p> <p>Video: YouTube channel</p>	<p>How to analyse a self-assessment and its evidence.</p> <p>How to differentiate between levels of achievement, applying the rubrics.</p>	AQU staff with QA experience.
Programme training - doctoral accreditation	Members of the specific assessment committees accrediting PhDs	<p>Knowledge of standards and criteria</p> <p>Knowledge of the process</p> <p>The role of each member</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Review guide</p> <p>Video: YouTube channel</p>	<p>How to analyse a self-assessment and its evidence.</p> <p>How to differentiate between levels of achievement, applying the rubrics.</p>	AQU staff with QA experience.

Type of training INITIAL	Target	Content of the training	Training material	Learning outcomes/skills	Trainer Profile
IQMS Certification training	Members of the specific assessment committees certifying IQMSs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of standards and criteria Knowledge of the process The role of each member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Review guide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to analyse a self-assessment and its evidence. How to differentiate between levels of achievement, applying the rubrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AQU staff with QA experience Committee members
Training for presidents and secretaries	Committee presidents and secretaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of standards and criteria Knowledge of the process The role of each member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Review guide Criteria for the drafting of reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to differentiate between levels of achievement, applying the rubrics. How to write a review report. How to manage a meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AQU staff with QA experience Committee members
Training for students	Students on the committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of standards and criteria Knowledge of the process The role of each member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Review guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to analyse a self-assessment and its evidence. How to differentiate levels between levels of achievement, applying the rubrics, especially for the standards most relevant to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AQU staff with QA experience

Support for experts

Type of activity	Activities
Support from the internal university coordinator	Attendance at initial meetings
	Joint review of reports
	Resolution of queries regarding methodology
Specific communication	Emails with documentation
Documentary database	Extranet has a repository of documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended evidence and indicators for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees. • Protocols Manual-Extranet.pdf • Support for the review of joint degrees • Key accreditation issues • Assessment scope and standards • The accreditation process • Re-accreditation
Presidents	Previous membership of other committees
	Positive prior appraisal as a member of other committees
Expert assessment	Internal assessment of three aspects.
	- Preparation
	- Review meeting
	- Report

Specific and update training

Type of activity	Activities
General seminars	
Specific seminars	<p>New trends: on-line review,</p> <p>Review processes: European Approach</p> <p>Sectoral seminars: ICT, education, tourism, etc.</p>
Training days	Attendance of the training days organised by AQU, with the aim of reflecting on issues in the field of university quality.
Publications	Sending of publications to active members
Thematic studies	<p>Sending of publications to active members</p> <p>Employment outcomes</p> <p>Employers' opinion</p> <p>Satisfaction of recent graduates</p> <p>Catalonia Talent Observatory</p> <p>Via Universitària III</p>
Cross-sectional communications	<p>AQU Newsletter: Information on the latest developments in the field of quality assessment, legal framework, new projects, etc.</p> <p>Periodic dispatch of cross-sectional reports, meta-evaluations, etc. (e.g.: 2020 Institutional and Programme Review Commission activity report</p>

Examples:

Year	Type of training	Session	Target
2021	Webinar	The challenges of university education in Early Childhood and Primary Education	Experts in Social Sciences
	Webinar	OpenU Project “Quality Assurance of Online Education”	Global
2021	Seminar	European Approach: challenges and opportunities for Catalan universities,	EA Programme Review Members
2021	Seminar	Challenges in university education in Computer Science and Telecommunications	ICT Experts
2021	Seminar	Short programmes (Micro-credentials): results of the initial experience	Global
2021	Seminar	Reflecting on the future of European Quality Assurance	Global
2021	Seminar	The AUDIT programme. Designing internal quality assurance systems for university education	Members of certification committees
2021	Seminar	Challenges in university education in Journalism and Audiovisual Communication	Experts in Social Sciences

ANNEX 7: CONSIDERATION OF ESG PART 1 IN REVIEW METHODOLOGIES

PROGRAMME REVIEW

ESG		Validation / Modification	Monitoring	Accreditation	Short learning programmes - Micro- credentials	European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
1.1.	Policy for quality assurance	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	8. Internal quality assurance system	I. Quality assurance system
1.2.	Design and approval of programmes	1. Description of the title 2. Justification 3. Competences 5. Programme's planning 8. Expected Results	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	5. Planning	B. Justification C. Knowledge, skills, and competences I. Quality assurance system
1.3.	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3. Competències 5. Programme's planning	3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes	3. Aim and learning outcomes 5. Planning	E. Study programme (curriculum) I. Quality assurance system
1.4.	Student admission, progression,	4. Student access and admissions		3.1. Quality of the training programme	4. Student access, admissions and student support	D. Student access and admission I. Quality assurance system

	recognition and certification			3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes		
1.5.	Teaching staff	6. Teaching and support staff	3.4. Suitability of teaching staff for the training programme	3.4. Suitability of teaching staff for the training programme	6. Teaching and support staff	F. Academic staff G. Material resources and services I. Quality assurance system
1.6.	Learning resources and student support	7. Material resources and services	3.5. Effectiveness of learning support systems	3.5. Effectiveness of learning support systems	4. Student access, admissions and student support 7. Material resources and services	G. Material resources and services I. Quality assurance system
1.7.	Information management	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information	3.2. Relevance of the public information	8. Internal quality assurance System	I. Quality assurance system
1.8.	Public information	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information	3.2. Relevance of the public information	8. Internal quality assurance System	H. Expected outcomes I. Quality assurance system
1.9.	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	9. Internal quality assurance system	Procedure	3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	8. Internal quality assurance System	I. Quality assurance system
1.10.	Cyclical external quality assurance	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

	ESG	Ex-post IQAs certification	Institutional accreditation	Teaching assessment handbooks²²
1.1.	<i>Policy for quality assurance</i>	1. IQAS review and improvement 6. Public information and accountability	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process
1.2.	<i>Design and approval of programmes</i>	2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes	Not applicable	Not applicable
1.3.	<i>Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</i>	2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes 3. Teaching-learning and support for students	Not applicable	Not applicable
1.4.	<i>Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</i>	3. Teaching-learning and support for students	Not applicable	Not applicable
1.5.	<i>Teaching staff</i>	4. Academic staff	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process
1.6.	<i>Learning resources and student support</i>	3. Teaching-learning and support for students 5. Physical resources and services	Not applicable	Not applicable

²² The scope of this activity is limited in its nature, nevertheless it has been accepted in the ToR due to the fact that AQU covers the remaining standards in its other reviews for the institutions in question.

1.7.	<i>Information management</i>	1. IQAS review and improvement 6. Public information and accountability	B. Results data and its assessment of the entire pre- accreditation period E. Rating agent's satisfaction and their results	B. Results data and its assessment of the entire pre- accreditation period E. Rating agent's satisfaction and their results
1.8.	<i>Public information</i>	6. Public information and accountability	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it
1.9.	<i>On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</i>	1. IQAS review and improvement 2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes 3. Teaching-learning and support for students	2. Design, approval and roll-out of training programmes 7. Implementation of the IQAS and academic results	Not applicable
1.10.	<i>Cyclical external quality assurance</i>	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure

ESG		International quality assurance	Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
1.1.	<i>Policy for quality assurance</i>	3.1.9. Governance	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system
1.2.	<i>Design and approval of programmes</i>	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system
1.3.	<i>Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</i>	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards 3.1.6. The institution's relations with the wider community and society in general 3.1.7. The institution's relations with other institutions for academic exchange	3.1.2. Management of the training program in Catalonia
1.4.	<i>Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</i>	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards 3.1.4. Learning assessment	3.1.2. Management of the training program in Catalonia

1.5.	<i>Teaching staff</i>	3.1.2. Teaching staff 3.1.8. Research	3.1.3. Resources
1.6.	<i>Learning resources and student support</i>	3.1.3. Learning resources	3.1.3. Resources
1.7.	<i>Information management</i>	3.1.5. Information	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system
1.8.	<i>Public information</i>	3.1.5. Information 3.1.9. Governance	3.1.1. Public information
1.9.	<i>On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</i>	Procedure	Procedure
1.10.	<i>Cyclical external quality assurance</i>	Procedure	Procedure

ANNEX 8: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN AQU METHODOLOGY AND THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

Details of the correspondence between the European Approach and the AQU Catalunya methodology are given below.

Table 12. Correspondence between AQU methodology and the European Approach

European Approach	AQU ex ante Accreditation	AQU ex post Accreditation
1 Eligibility —	1 Program description 2 Justification ²³	— —
2 Learning Outcomes	3 Knowledge, skills and competences	1 Quality of the study programme 6 Quality of programme learning outcomes
4 Admission and Recognition 6 Student Support	4 Student admission and selection	1 Quality of the study programme
2 Learning Outcomes 3 Study Programme 5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment	5 Study Programme	1 Quality of the study programme
7.1 Resources: staff	6 Academic Staff	4 Suitability of teaching staff for the study programme
6 Student support 7.2 Resources: facilities	7 Material resources and services	5 Effectiveness of learning support systems
—	8 Expected results ²⁴	—
9 Quality assurance	9 Quality assurance system	3 Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system
8 Transparency and Documentation	—	2 Relevance of the public information
2 Learning Outcomes 5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment	—	6 Quality of programme learning outcomes

²³ Aspects specific to the Catalan context.

²⁴ Aspects specific to the Catalan context.

ANNEX 9: CAME ANALYSIS APPLIED TO SWOT

The results of the CAME (Correct, Address, Maintain and Exploit) methodology applied to the SWOT analysis in 2019, the basis of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022, are detailed below.

Table 13. CAME analysis applied to SWOT

Strengths to maintain	Weaknesses to correct
Trained expert staff who feel committed to the activity they carry out	Perception of excessive bureaucratisation and the need for further simplification of the review processes
Ability to innovate and promote new projects in its areas of expertise	Restrictive budget that limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the ability to provide remuneration equal to that of experts in other equivalent agencies and the appointment of international experts ✓ alignment of the number of staff with the volume of activity ✓ the issuing of annual calls for teaching staff assessment ✓ adherence to and potential shortening of assessment deadlines
	Continuous training for experts
	Internal and external exchange of in-house staff to facilitate better adaptation to change
	Lack of knowledge on the part of university students, or future students, of the results of the degree programme assessments.
Opportunities to exploit	Threats to face
Raising awareness of the Catalan Higher Education System, especially the future student body, of the value (cost/benefit) of the quality assessment processes and of having qualified information on university degree programmes	Minor impact on decisions related to own sphere of action within the Catalan and Spanish university systems
Growing interest in the data collected, standardised and managed by AQU Catalunya	Non-recognition of the review activities of AQU Catalunya's contracted teaching staff by other state agencies
	Involvement of the university student body in quality assurance

ANNEX 10: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Table 14. Glossary of terms

AQU	Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
CAIP	Institutional and Programme Review Commission
CAME	Correct, Address, Maintain and Exploit
CEUCAT	Student council body for Catalan universities
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for the external Quality Assurance of Higher Education
ESU	European Students Union
EQAR	The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EUC	University Studies of Catalonia
REACU	Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQAs	Internal quality assurance system and quality and information security management system
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
VSMA	Framework for validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation