



**AQU CATALUNYA ANNUAL
ACTIVITIES AND
CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY REPORT**

SUMMARISED VERSION

2020



AQU CATALUNYA

AQU CATALUNYA ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT

SUMMARISED VERSION

2020

BARCELONA, 2021

© Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya
Carrer d'Eric Granados, 33
08007 Barcelona

First edition: June 2021

The contents of this work are subject to a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#). Reproduction, distribution and public communication are permitted as long as the author is cited and the work is not used commercially.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	7
COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION	17
1. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY	17
1.1. Programme review	17
1.2. Institutional review	21
1.3. Research assessment at department level.....	22
1.4. Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks.....	23
1.5. Support for the internationalisation of the Catalan university system.....	23
2. TEACHING STAFF QUALITY	25
2.1. Assessment of teaching staff prior to university selection processes	25
2.2. Accreditation of merits in research, teaching and management.....	27
3. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER	33
3.1. Surveys and indicators of the higher education system in Catalonia	33
3.2. Studies and reports.....	37
COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY	39
4. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER	39
4.1. Knowledge transfer	39
4.2. Communication tools.....	42
COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE	45
5. Strategic Management	45
5.1. Strategic management	45
5.2. Governing, QA and advisory bodies	46
5.3. Expert assessment staff	46
6. INTERNAL ORGANISATION	48
COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES	49
7. ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL AGENTS IN CATALONIA	49
8. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL	51

9.	INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS.....	51
9.1.	International institutional relations.....	51
9.2.	International projects, reviews and exchange.....	52
	COMMITMENT TO SAFE AND ETHICAL WORKING CONDITIONS	55
10.	INTERNAL ORGANISATION	55
10.1.	Human resources	55

INTRODUCTION

As we do every year, we have drawn up the AQU Catalunya ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT for the previous year in order to be accountable to the university community and to society. Drafting the report involves a process of reconstructing our most recent past activities. By comprehensively reviewing our agendas, records, databases, reports and news, we analyse and evaluate what we have done and how, while reliving each moment.

Of all the years that I have been Director of AQU Catalunya, this has undoubtedly been the most different, the most intense and the most exceptional.

The year 2020 will go down in history as the year of COVID-19, a pandemic that has affected everyone without distinction and that has forced us to learn how to adapt to new circumstances.

I would like to highlight the invisible but extremely important work that all the people responsible for the higher education system in Catalonia have done and continue to do. The management teams of the universities and higher education institutions, the Secretariat for Universities and Research and AQU Catalunya have managed to provide a joint response to society to [minimise the impact of the coronavirus over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year](#) and to highlight the quality of the education provided in Catalonia. To paraphrase the Secretary for Universities and Research, Dr Francesc Xavier Grau, at the last meeting of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya: “The Catalan university system has always taken into account quality assurance criteria in all the measures that have been adopted during this exceptional period. This is a key part of our culture, and one that must be maintained”. We could not agree more.

Also worthy of mention is AQU Catalunya’s capacity to respond to this new context, which I would summarise as follows:

We were technologically prepared. On the eve of the declaration of the state of alarm, 100% of the staff of AQU Catalunya took their portable equipment and have since been working from home without notable incident. This has been possible thanks to the progressive implementation of the ISO 27001 information security management standard, with which AQU was certified in 2015. One of the requirements of the Standard is risk analysis to ensure access to information. In order to be prepared, laptop computers and software that enabled us to work remotely were gradually introduced, the hosting of the information was outsourced and backups were made to ensure the restoration of the information in a maximum of two weeks. In December 2019 we took the final step by introducing Office 365 as a working tool. In the weeks preceding the State of Alarm, the AQU Catalunya crisis committee met to analyse the possible scenarios, and we were able to put all the theoretical work we had been doing into practice.

The Agency completed the project to implement e-administration in all the assessment processes we manage. The institutional and programme assessment processes were already

working virtually and the teacher assessment processes had been changed over by 2019. In January 2020, ORDER EMC/6/2020, of 17 January, approving the compulsory electronic processing of the assessment, certification and accreditation procedures of the Research Assessment Committee of the Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya premonitorily established the use of electronic means in the assessment, certification and accreditation by the Research Assessment Committee for those requesting assessment from the first calls of 2020.

We quickly adapted our procedures and activities. The effects of the pandemic and the state of alarm that most impacted on the Agency's activity were: on the one hand, the suspension of the administrative deadlines affecting the calls for assessment of teaching staff, the deadlines for accreditation of degree programmes, the deadlines for submission of modifications and verification reports, the submission of appeals and the procurement of goods and services; and, on the other, the switch from face-to-face to online activities such as the meetings, conferences and workshops, and, above all, virtual visits for certification and accreditation. Within a few weeks of the declaration of the state of alarm, and with a clear vocation for public service, the Agency was able to adapt the face-to-face assessment processes, undertaking them virtually and becoming one of the first European agencies to do so successfully. The documents that were created (and which have been updated) can be found in the [COVID-19 space](#). The virtual assessment model has been presented in different European forums and has become a benchmark for both speed of response and effectiveness.

We have been able to guarantee zero risks and zero contagion in AQU Catalunya's spaces. In this past year we have pushed for a policy to reduce the risks to a minimum. For this reason we have been working remotely practically all the time, while the face-to-face work has been carried out on an ad hoc basis and only for justified reasons. All face-to-face meetings have been conducted in strict compliance with the established security measures, and as a result of this policy, we are pleased to say that there have been no cases of COVID -19 infection in the Agency's offices.

Without a doubt, it is the adaptation to the pandemic that has marked this year, and it is difficult to convey just how much focus and how many hours we have dedicated to thinking about, designing, adapting and transforming assessment procedures. However, the results are clear to see and have had quite an impact.

2020 was not just the year of COVID-19. As you will see in this Report, for AQU Catalunya it involved much, much more. I would like to highlight five initiatives that I believe could become strategic in the coming years:

- > **Strengthening the role of institutional accreditation.** The Governing Board has approved the strengthening of institutional accreditation processes for the period 2022 to 2024. This momentum should allow for the complete transition of degree accreditation processes to institutions, and means that instead of visiting large institutions once a year, we will visit them once every five years, which will save resources on all sides. In 2020 the Agency has

also approved the Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation, which it will roll out with the corresponding assessment guidelines.

- > **Signing of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).** The Governing Board, at the proposal of the President of the AQU Catalunya Research Assessment Committee and the President of AQU Catalunya, has approved support for the DORA. The Research Assessment Committee has reflected on and started to introduce elements aimed at incorporating the recommendations of DORA, such as removing the constraints on references and considering other datasets and bibliographies, and the consideration of other quality indicators such as the citations received by articles.
- > **Assessment of inter-university degrees in line with the European Approach.** AQU Catalunya has approved two highly relevant [documents](#) in 2020. Firstly, the conditions for the recognition of joint programmes using the European Approach Framework and, secondly, the guidelines for the verification of inter-university programmes following the European Approach. These evaluations apply to inter-university programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions in two or more states, with the aim of simplifying the evaluation processes so that these degrees need only be evaluated in one of the states participating in the degree. In 2020, AQU Catalunya used this methodology in two degree programmes.
- > **The AQU Catalunya accreditation process in accordance with the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME).** As of 2023, the United States will only accept graduates who have studied at medical schools accredited by agencies that follow WFME standards. In order to increase its prestige and recognition as a global benchmark for all medical graduates in the Catalan University System, AQU Catalunya has begun to work towards accreditation in these standards. In 2020, the WFME considered AQU Catalunya eligible for accreditation according to these standards.
- > **Verification of short-term programmes.** In 2020, the opportunity arose to include a new scenario that will create connections between higher education and vocational training. An Assessment Guide has been approved and a pilot project has been launched to assess short-term programmes that support continuous professional development and lifelong learning. The idea is that programmes that are given a favourable assessment based on this guide can be transferred to the Public Employment Service of Catalonia for inclusion in the Catalan Catalogue of Training Specialities.

Another important development in 2020 is the change of address of the AQU Catalunya headquarters. AQU Catalunya has been leasing premises at number 33 Carrer Enric Granados since 1 June and successfully completed the move on 14 and 15 July 2020. Since then, as the organisation that is leasing most of the space in the building, it has been responsible for the management of general services and business coordination.

As was the case last year, the AQU CATALUNYA ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY REPORT 2020 is structured around the corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments to which the Agency wishes to respond. Each of these commitments, in turn, is linked to certain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the UN's 2030 Global Agenda. A brief summary of the Agency's activities in 2020 can be found below, grouped by commitment and area of action:

COMMITMENT TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION. This commitment includes all the actions that promote the improvement of the higher education system in Catalonia:



- > **Institutional quality.** Further work was carried out to develop the Framework for the verification, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised university degrees. A total of 450 degrees were assessed, 15% less than the previous year: 71 verifications, 93% of which were favourable; 54 qualifications with conditions, which have been monitored; 195 amendment requests, 99% of which were successful; and 130 degrees, which were externally assessed in 67 visits, 25% less than in 2019. 26 accreditation reports were issued for degree programmes: 80% were accredited, 12% were accredited with conditions and the remaining 8% were accredited with the Seal of Excellence. And, for the first time, accreditation of short-term programmes was initiated with the verification of seven programmes in the field of ICT. In the case of institutional evaluation, 11 external visits were organised in 2020 for the certification of internal quality assurance systems and seven centres obtained institutional accreditation. Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation were also approved and the Governing Board approved the commitment to promote institutional accreditation during the period 2022-2024. The project for the evaluation of the research activity of university departments was developed but had to be put on hold. Work was begun on the process of accrediting the Teaching Evaluation Manuals. In the field of internationalisation of degrees, the methodology for the evaluation of inter-university programmes according to the European Approach was approved. A comparative study of AQU Catalunya's accreditation model with that of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) was completed and it was confirmed that AQU Catalunya is eligible to start the institutional accreditation process according to the WFME. Furthermore, accreditation processes were implemented in the universities that wanted to obtain labels. In terms of methodology, approval was given to the Accreditation Standards and Criteria for Higher Education Institutions, the *Guide to ex-ante Accreditation of joint programmes using the European Approach* and the Pilot guidelines for the ex-ante accreditation of short term programmes. The revision of the Guide to the accreditation of recognised doctoral (PhD) programmes was published, with the main changes relating to the assessment of the quality of results (Dimension 6); and those of the Guide to the

Certification of Internal Quality Assurance System Implementation and the Guide for the follow-up of arts higher education programmes.

- > **Teaching staff quality.** For the first time, all the calls have been managed electronically since the issuance of ORDER EMC/6/2020, of 17 January, which approves the mandatory electronic processing of the evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures of the Research Assessment Committee of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency. During 2020, 1,845 applications for pre-selection assessments were received from universities, 23% less than in the previous year: 1,116 requests for tenure-eligible lecturer level reports, 463 requests for research accreditations and 252 requests for advanced research. The percentages of favourable results were 68%, 67% and 59%, respectively. We continued to issue the Report for temporary contract teaching staff under the Serra Húnter Plan, designed for tenure-eligible lecturers in Catalan public universities. In the framework of the Sierra Húnter Plan, 14 applications were submitted. The general procedure for issuing the report for tenure-eligible lecturers was also modified, allowing, in exceptional cases, applicants who meet certain requirements to submit an application for the issuance of a tenure-eligible lecturer's report throughout the year. In the case of the six-year research periods (research premiums), 440 applications were submitted for the evaluation of ordinary civil servant teaching and research staff, 88% of which were favourable, and a new call for recognition of the research premium in knowledge transfer and innovation was opened, in which 413 applications were submitted by civil servant teaching and research staff. A total of 664 applications for contract teaching staff were received from public universities, 87% of which were successful. There were 171 research premiums through agreements, 71% of which were favourable. AQU Catalunya certified the merits in teaching for the 2019 call for applications and issued 50 teaching activity certificates. In addition, the procedure for the renewal of the accreditation of the teaching assessment handbooks of Catalan public universities was modified. Finally, 281 management premiums were favourably certified. The Research Assessment Committee has reflected on and introduced measures to adapt assessment activities to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which AQU Catalunya signed in 2020, and has also analysed measures to mitigate the consequences of maternity/paternity leave on the research career of teaching and research staff and has reviewed the assessment criteria, with a particular focus on the modification of the assessment criteria for tenure-eligible lecturers and the assessment of research in Nursing and Physiotherapy.
- > **Knowledge generation and transfer.** In 2020, the 7th Survey on the employment outcomes of graduates from Catalan universities was carried out. The reports on bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees have been published and submitted. The survey also included graduates of Arts Higher Education programmes and the third study on gender-based differences twenty years after graduation, promoted with the Catalan Women's Institute and the Inter-University Council of Catalonia. In addition, Idescat has collaborated in carrying out a population-based study on employment outcomes and to monitor the

number of graduates making social security contributions in order to assess the impact of COVID-19 between March and October 2020. The Agency has also worked on the project to gain the perspective of employers on graduate outcomes; specifically, 6 reports have been produced (Design, Psychology, ICT, Construction, Nursing and Medicine) and, although it was only possible to hold a presentation of the results for the first of these areas in February, for the second and third areas, virtual meetings were held with the corresponding dean's offices. The Agency has closed the fieldwork for the satisfaction survey of graduates who completed their Bachelor's or Master's studies in 2018 and has started the satisfaction survey of 2019 graduates. Preparatory work has begun prior to the fieldwork for the Via Universitària survey. In the area of establishing indicators for decision-making, work has continued, firstly, to support the Secretariat for Universities and Research in maintaining the indicators that form part of the UNEIX information system and, secondly, on the construction of an indicator management tool that will enable all available indicators to be catalogued so that in the future they can be consulted on a single platform. AQU Catalunya has also produced reports for universities, submitted to the heads of each university, that compile all the Agency's available data and compare them with those of the Catalan average. Another study is the exploration of the use of machine learning in assessment processes to create identifiers that can improve the consistency of teacher assessments.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY. This commitment encompasses all the measures that AQU Catalunya promotes in order to communicate the results of its activities to society:

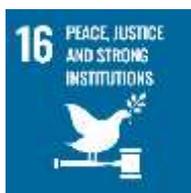


- > **Knowledge transfer.** In 2020, the new EUC Studies portal was launched, which publishes results on the quality of degrees and where bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies can be consulted, as well as institutional accreditation seals. The EUC Studies portal links to the EUC Reports portal, where the reports of the different quality assessment programmes are presented, and to EUC Data, which shows the results of the surveys coordinated by the Agency and where in 2020 the results of the employment outcomes survey for bachelor's and master's degrees and the 2019 satisfaction survey were published. During 2020, the Agency organised a total of six conferences: One face-to-face and five virtual. A face-to-face conference was held to present the results of the challenges in university education in the field of Design, as well as a virtual conference to present the results of the 2020 employment outcomes study. Of the other conferences, two were organised in partnership with state agencies to analyse Nursing and Tourism studies, one was for the analysis of RACO (Catalan Journals in Open Access), which included four sessions, and one was held within the European Skills4Employability project, which included three sessions. More than

2,000 people signed up to take part in these conferences. AQU Catalunya released 18 original publications, including reports on employment outcomes, institutional documents and assessment methodologies.

- > **Communication tools.** AQU Catalunya disseminates its activities through the corporate website (and specific websites), which between them have had more than 200,000 visits by 124,000 users, giving a total of some 740,000 page views. In 2020 the project to build the new AQU Catalunya website was completed. The Agency has continued to publish its four annual newsletters, which have seen a 17% increase in the number of subscriptions (13,200). The Twitter account has remained active: at the end of 2020, the account had 2,173 followers, an increase of almost 18% over the previous year, and 333 tweets had been made. In addition, there were 699 mentions of @aqucatalunya and the profile received some 7,500 visits. The YouTube channel, which shows the videos of the conferences organised by the Agency, had 7,915 views in 2020, with an accumulated total of more than 20,000.

COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE. This commitment encompasses all the actions that AQU Catalunya adopts in order to transparently ensure that it provides an adequate response to the objectives:



- > **Strategic management.** AQU Catalunya has deployed the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan and the 2019-2022 Action Plan to respond to the need for assessment in accordance with European standards and guidelines. It has also adopted its resolutions through the relevant governance and evaluation bodies. In the case of the Governing Board, in addition to the financial and activity closure for 2019 and the planning of activities for 2021, it has given its approval to the modification of the address of AQU Catalunya, AQU Catalunya's addition as a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment and its commitment to promote institutional accreditation, and the planning of external visits to centres offering recognised university degrees for 2021. With regard to the assessment bodies, the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee has approved the action protocols and guidelines for the adaptation of study programmes in health emergencies and exceptional circumstances, the Accreditation Standards and Criteria for Higher Education Institutions, the modification of the assessment guidelines, the methodology for the implementation of the European Approach in Catalonia, and also the methodology for the ex-ante accreditation of short-term programmes linked to the Catalan Public Employment Service's Catalogue of Training in Specialised Fields. In addition, the Agency has also received the opinion of advisory bodies, such as the Advisory Committee, the Committee

of Vice-Rectors responsible for Quality and Academic Organisation, the Committee of Heads of Technical Quality Units, the Survey Committee and the Student Committee.

- > **Expert assessment staff.** AQU Catalunya carries out its assessment processes thanks to its expert assessment staff. In 2020, the pool of experts received 364 new CVs, and it currently consists of 2,115 people (57% academics, 20% professionals and 23% students). In 2020, 435 experts participated in the institutional and degree assessment processes and 308 in the academic staff evaluation processes. The Agency ensures that all its experts are properly trained before they participate in the assessment processes.
- > **Internal organisation.** AQU Catalunya has been accountable and transparent in the actions it has carried out, has put a lot of work into legal aspects, and has also kept up active maintenance of the information quality and security management system. It has promoted information and communication technologies to ensure the functioning and technological advancement of its activities. And, in the area of financial management, it has passed the financial audit for the financial year 2019 without any warnings. With regard to general services, it should be noted that AQU Catalunya has had a new address since 1 June, at Carrer de Enrique Granados, 33, 08007 Barcelona. As the majority leaseholder for the building, it has had to take charge of general services and business coordination. However, following the COVID-19 crisis, AQU Catalunya has organised its activities so as to permit as much remote work as possible, except for those services and activities that must be provided in person, and which have been carried out in accordance with the necessary health and safety measures.

COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS. This commitment encompasses all the actions that AQU Catalunya undertakes with social agents in Catalonia, as well as institutional relations at the national and international levels, in order to give them maximum visibility and improve higher education:



- > **Relations with social agents in Catalonia.** Within the Catalan higher education system, the Agency maintains relations mainly with the Secretariat for Universities and Research, with which it has continued to participate in the Standing Committee of the National Pact for the Knowledge Society, as well as the Working Group for the Professional Qualification of University Education; with the Inter-University Council of Catalonia, where it participates in the Academic Programming and Organisation Committee, the Academic Staff Committee, the Women and Science Committee, the General Conference and the Agenda 2030 Working Group; and with Catalan universities, to which, in addition to responding to their requests, it has presented the results of reports such as those on employment outcomes to

those who have requested them or employers with the deans of Psychology and ICT and the directors of the doctoral schools, it has given talks on gender issues in degrees and has participated in debates on the situation of universities in times of crisis. It also maintains relations with different bodies within certain Catalan Government departments: with the Department of Education, for the management of the assessment and quality of arts higher education; with the Directorate-General for Analysis and Prospective Studies of the Department of the Presidency, for the organisation of a conference on professional competences in the field of care provision) and with the Directorate-General for the Civil Service for the cataloguing of university degrees that may be open to public calls for applications. It also maintains relations with social agents to promote its own projects (Employers and Access to the Labour Market), as well as to gain first-hand knowledge and discuss the challenges and strengths of the Catalan university system.

- > **State institutional relations.** AQU Catalunya participated in the meetings convened by the Ministry of Universities for the establishment of new assessment criteria and continued to participate in the REACU network of Spanish agencies and to maintain relations with the other state quality agencies, some of which are organising joint sessions at the state level.
- > **International institutional relations.** AQU Catalunya has been chosen as the permanent seat of the Secretariat of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE); it has maintained relations with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and participated in the Assembly; and has liaised with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) for the promotion of the DEQAR. In addition, in 2020 it continued to participate in two European projects (Skill4Employability and CHARM-EU) and became involved in three new projects (SMART-QUE, Employability in Programme Development and Complex Trajectories). It has also given talks and participated in international discussions on quality assurance and evaluation systems in new virtual environments.

COMMITMENT TO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT. This commitment encompasses all the actions carried out for staff, so that they remain committed to the activity they carry out and are able to handle changes:



- > **Human resources.** In 2020, the AQU Catalunya Contingency Plan was activated, and since March 2020, the Agency's staff have been working 100% of the working day remotely, making it necessary to digitalise processes. This year has also seen an increase in temporary recruitment to cope with the backlog of tasks, and the exceptional pandemic situation has affected the job regularisation process.

Anyone interested in these matters can find a fuller explanation of the activities summarised here in this report.

As I said at the beginning, 2020 was an intense and exceptional year, especially because of the impacts at the human level.

Over the past year, some AQU Catalunya staff and collaborators have been very severely affected by COVID-19. It is at times like these that we have most sorely missed being able to transmit human warmth, affection and support in person.

Despite the ups and downs, I would like to thank the Agency's team for their efforts this year. In particular, I would like to thank it for how it has been able to respond quickly and efficiently to the unexpected situation, how it has reacted courageously and sought solutions where at first we only saw paralysis and confusion, how it has adapted to operating telematically without losing a single day of work, how it has placed the demand for quality and continuous improvement at the fore, how it has assisted the thousands of people who have contacted the Agency, helping them to adapt to the situation and making the processes easier for them.

I would also like to thank the experts who collaborate with AQU Catalunya, especially the academic staff, because it has also been a very hard year for them, as they have had to adapt their subjects to virtual methods and, at the same time, adapt to AQU's new way of working. Without you, our task would be impossible.

Thanks also to the management teams of the Catalan universities, rectors and vice-rectors, and to the team of the Secretariat for Universities and Research, for their trust, unity in the face of diversity and good work.

We are looking forward, hopefully in a not-too-distant future, to meeting again, to sharing stories, laughter and good times.

In the meantime, to all of you, THANK YOU!

Martí Casadesús Fa

Director of AQU Catalunya

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION



1. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY

This chapter describes all the activities related to the external quality assessment of official university degrees and the centres that offer them.

The assessment committees in charge of this task are the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee and its specific committees.

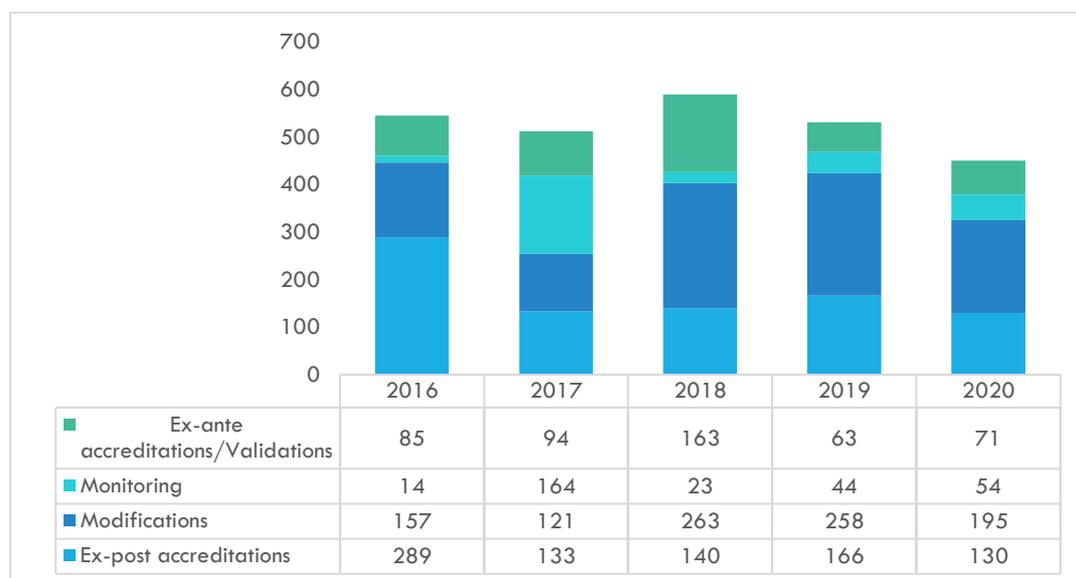
1.1. Programme review

In 2010 AQU Catalunya adopted the [Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of degree programmes](#) (VSMA Framework), which was subsequently updated in 2016 so as to establish a cyclical and harmonious system for the external review and quality assurance of recognised degree programmes and Arts higher education programmes delivered in higher education institutions in Catalonia.

The VSMA Framework establishes the relationship between the processes of **validation**, or ex-ante accreditation, which takes place prior to the introduction of programmes; the **monitoring** of programme delivery; the **modification** of programmes so that enhancements detected during the monitoring stage can be incorporated; and **ex-post accreditation**, whereby a panel of experts undertakes a external site visit to verify that programme delivery is taking place as planned. For delivery purposes, recognised degree programmes are required to undergo and pass a cyclical accreditation procedure.

Developments in the implementation of the VSMA Framework in Catalonia over the last five years were as follows:

Graphic 1. Developments in validation, monitoring, modification and Accreditation (2016–2020)¹



Mainly due to the effect of the pandemic, in 2020 AQU Catalunya carried out 15% fewer degree programme reviews than in 2019.

Actions in the VSMA Framework given the effects of the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus

During 2020, AQU Catalunya rapidly adapted its procedures to the exceptional circumstances arising from the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus pandemic.

In terms of institutional and programme reviews, effective protocols have been developed to maintain the activities related to the VSMA (ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degrees) Framework while responding to the needs of the Catalan university system. The Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee has approved the following documents:

- > Guidelines for the adaptation of study programmes in health emergencies and exceptional circumstances, including compulsory external internships and bachelor's and master's degree final projects.

¹ Includes higher arts education equivalent to a bachelor's degree.

- > Considerations of AQU Catalunya on the state of emergency and teaching in higher education.
- > The Protocol for action for the accreditation of recognised degree programmes in the exceptional circumstances resulting from the effects of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.
- > The Protocol for action in the VSMA Framework due to the effects of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.
- > VSMA framework actions by AQU Catalunya due to the effects of Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

In addition, AQU Catalunya has extended the deadlines for the submission of reports for the accreditation of new degree programmes or the modification of existing ones. Specifically, the modification reports could be submitted up to 15 days after the end of the state of alarm and the reports for the verification of new degrees could be submitted up to 15 June 2020.

AQU Catalunya also had to re-plan the accreditation visits scheduled during the health emergency and during the second half of 2020, and has adapted its face-to-face visits by adapting them to a virtual format.

Validation, modification and monitoring

The purpose of validation, which is an ex-ante accreditation procedure, is to ensure the design quality of all proposals for first degrees (bachelors), masters and doctoral/PhD degrees prior to their introduction.

A total number of 71 proposals were submitted for validation by universities in Catalonia in 2020: 24 first degrees/bachelors, 44 masters and 3 doctoral programmes.

93% of all the proposals submitted for validation were successful: 100% of the first degrees/bachelors, 90% of the masters and 100% of the doctoral/PhD programmes.

93% of all the proposals submitted for ex-ante accreditation were successful

In **monitoring**, an institution can either correct any observed deviations or propose enhancements for excellence and prepare for a subsequent accreditation procedure.

In 2020, the Agency monitored programmes that had been previously accredited and granted accreditation that was conditional. Out of a total of 54 programmes at 36 faculties and schools, 36 were first degrees/bachelors, 11 masters, 2 higher vocational programmes and 7 Arts higher education master's programmes.

As for applications to **modify** currently running courses of study, 195 proposals to make modifications in the 2020-2021 academic year were received in 2020: 82 first degrees/bachelors, 87 masters and 26 doctoral/PhD programmes.

In overall terms, 99% of the modification applications were accepted.



93% of all the proposals submitted for validation were successful

Verification of short-term programmes

In the context of higher education in Catalonia, the opportunity has arisen to include a new scenario that will create connections between higher education and vocational training.

AQU Catalunya has launched a pilot project for the ex-ante assessment of short-term programmes that support continuous professional development and lifelong learning.

During 2020, the assessment focused on seven short-term programmes linked to the field of Information and Communication Technologies. In order to carry out this evaluation, the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee approved the *Pilot guidelines for the ex-ante accreditation of short-term programmes linked to the Catalan Public Employment Service's Catalogue of Training in Specialised Fields*.

Site visits

During 2020, 89 external site visits were organised to review and evaluate the delivery of 130 degree programmes. Nineteen (19) of these were first degrees/bachelors, 104 masters, 7 doctoral/PhD programmes.

Accreditation reports

During 2020, higher education institutions submitted 127 applications and AQU Catalunya issued 26 accreditation reports for recognised degree programmes. 8% of the programmes granted accreditation received a qualification of on-track-to-excellence and in 12% of cases accreditation was conditional. In the case of the latter, programmes must submit a progress report within two years, showing that any shortcomings identified have been resolved.

1.2. Institutional review

In line with the Agency's Strategic Plan for 2019-2022, AQU Catalunya began to give more impetus to institutional review at faculty level, which will gradually replace programme review.

Institutional accreditation and the certification of IQAs (internal quality assurance system) implementation are the first set of actions that deal with this strategic objective.

In 2020, AQU Catalunya's Governing Board approved the Agency's Commitment to promoting institutional accreditation. This commitment includes an awareness-raising campaign and the implementation of tools to support the institutional accreditation process, in order to stimulate the participation of educational institutions in institutional accreditation processes; the agreement of an Institutional Accreditation Plan 2022-2024, with the goal of 100% institutional accreditation of centres; and the promotion of the necessary economic measures so that centres that choose not to be institutionally accredited during the term of the Accreditation Plan assume the costs of programme accreditation.

Certification of internal quality assurance system implementation

The IQAs certification programme verifies that an internal quality assurance system (IQAs) has been implemented in the faculty/school responsible for the delivery of the degree programmes covered by the IQAs, and that it is fit for purpose in terms of programme quality assurance.



IQAs certification for main faculties and partner and affiliated schools in Catalonia began in 2018 in compliance with one of the criteria laid down by legislation (Royal Decree 420/2015) as a first step to obtaining institutional accreditation.

Thus, during 2020, the assessment process of institution-wide aspects of universities, initiated in 2019, was completed and two public universities were assessed with a favourable result.

In terms of methodology, a new version of the *Guide to the Certification of Internal Quality Assurance System Implementation* was published in 2020 and the document *Criteria for writing reports for the certification of IQAs implementation (internal quality assurance systems)* was drawn up. This document defines the structure of the reports and gives guidelines to the assessment committees for drafting certification visit reports.

Finally, with the aim of training the members of the external assessment committees, AQU Catalunya organised four training sessions in which some twenty experts took part.

Institutional accreditation



Institutional accreditation confers accreditation to all recognised first degree and master's programmes being delivered in the faculty/school for a period of five years, renewable once.

Faculties and schools that have renewed the accreditation on 50% of their degree programmes (50% of first degrees/bachelors and 50% of the masters programmes) and that have obtained certification for IQAs implementation are eligible to obtain institutional accreditation.

In 2020, the School of Engineering – IQS (URL), the School of Management IQS (URL), the Faculty of Chemistry (URV), the School of Engineering (URV), the Faculty of Psychology (UAB), the Barcelona School of Management (UPF) and the Barcelona Graduate School of Economics (UPF).

This brings the number of institutionally accredited centres in Catalonia up to 11.

In addition, the centres will have to renew the accreditation at the end of the five-year validity period. AQU Catalunya has approved the **Accreditation Standards and Criteria for Higher Education Institutions**.

1.3. Research assessment at department level



The assessment by AQU Catalunya of research being carried out in university departments in Catalonia is a pioneering project in Spain. Its aim is to strengthen the role of universities and other HEIs as high-level international research

organisations.

In 2020, a project was drawn up to carry out a second assessment process of the research activity of UPF departments. Due to the pandemic, the original schedule has been revised.

1.4. Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks

Since 2003, AQU Catalunya has been working with Catalan universities on the development and application of models for the assessment of their teaching staff, with the aim of helping universities to design their own mechanisms for managing the teaching quality of their academic staff and promoting their development and recognition, in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

This programme allows universities to implement their own teaching assessment handbooks, which set out the assessment policy and methods used. These handbooks must have been previously accredited by AQU Catalunya.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the procedure for renewing the accreditation of the teaching assessment handbooks of Catalan public universities was modified in 2020. Unlike previous accreditation processes, external accreditation committees will not conduct face-to-face visits to the universities being assessed. This will be the third time that the accreditation process for teaching assessment handbooks has been carried out.

1.5. Support for the internationalisation of the Catalan university system

AQU Catalunya has identified the internationalisation of university education in Catalonia as one of the areas for promoting excellence in higher education. It uses different mechanisms to support this: the additional dimension of internationalisation, stopped in 2020 due to lack of resources, and subject-specific certifications.

Two further activities were carried out in 2020 in this area: the assessment of inter-university programmes according to the European Approach, and the accreditation of AQU Catalunya according to the World Federation for Medical Education.

Assessment of inter-university programmes according to the European Approach

In 2015, higher education ministers approved the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#) (EA) at the Yerevan conference, with the aim of simplifying joint programme external assessment processes. By using common standards, the European Approach should enable these programmes to be assessed in only one of the states participating in the programme.

The European Approach can only be applied to joint programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions **from two or more countries**.

During 2020, AQU Catalunya has developed the following methodology:

- > [Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programmes accreditations using the European Approach framework.](#)
- > [Guide for Joint Programmes ex-ante accreditation using the European Approach.](#)

Accreditation according to the World Federation for Medical Education

The internationalisation of medical education in quality assurance procedures is an important issue at the present time. AQU Catalunya is fully aware of the growing interest in the international accreditation of basic medical education and for this reason it is placing special emphasis on introducing the global standards of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) in current accreditation procedures.

L'any 2020, AQU Catalunya ha aprovat el document "AQU accreditation process. Includes the WFME Basic Standards of Basic Medical Education (BME)" que ha estat la base per a l'elaboració de l'Annex II de la *Guia per a l'acreditació de les titulacions oficials de grau i màster*. Així mateix, la WFME ha confirmat que AQU Catalunya és elegible per iniciar el procés d'acreditació institucional.

Subject-specific certifications

In accordance with the [Framework for the positioning of AQU Catalunya regarding subject-specific quality labels](#), the Agency has carried out an assessment for the accreditation of qualifications and an assessment for the award of the EUR-ACE® international subject-specific certification. The School of Chemical Engineering of Rovira i Virgili University has submitted the following programmes for assessment: Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering and Master's Degree in Environmental Engineering and Energy Sustainability.

2. TEACHING STAFF QUALITY

In addition to the assessment activities detailed below, the Research Assessment Committee has discussed and made progress in the following areas:

- > **Measures to adapt the assessment activity to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).**
- > **Taking measures to reduce the consequences of maternity/paternity leave on the research career of teaching and research staff.**
- > **Modification of assessment criteria for tenure-eligible lecturers and research in Nursing and Physiotherapy.**

2.1. Assessment of teaching staff prior to university selection processes²

In order to be admitted to the selection processes for tenured faculty at Catalan public universities, interested parties must have received a favourable report, in the case of the category of tenure-eligible lecturer, and accreditation of research or advanced research, for the categories of assistant lecturer and professor. Thus, accreditation is a mechanism established by the regulations that allows an external agent (AQU Catalunya) to assess whether applicants meet a minimum threshold of quality and/or scientific experience and/or production as a prior step to applying for positions at universities. As such, accreditations do not serve to establish rankings or hierarchies of individuals or to guarantee employment contracts.

In 2020, two ordinary calls were made for the issuance of reports for the hiring of tenure-eligible lecturers and, as a result of the collaboration with the Government of Catalonia under the Serra Húnter Plan (SHP) for the recruitment of university lecturers, two further calls were made in the framework of this programme. The same occurred with regards to research accreditation: two ordinary calls and two further calls were issued under the SHP. Finally, as regards support for the Serra Húnter Plan, a new specific call was opened for the evaluation of tenure-eligible lecturers, to give accreditation to SHP non-permanent contract teaching staff. In the case of research accreditation, two ordinary calls were made and two further calls in the framework of the agreement with the University of Navarra. The evaluation of these calls is the responsibility of the Research Assessment Committee and its specific committees.

In January 2020, ORDER EMC/6/2020, of 17 January, approving the compulsory electronic processing of the assessment, certification and accreditation procedures of the Research Assessment Committee of the Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya

² All data relating to teacher assessments in this section have been taken as of 1 February 2021.

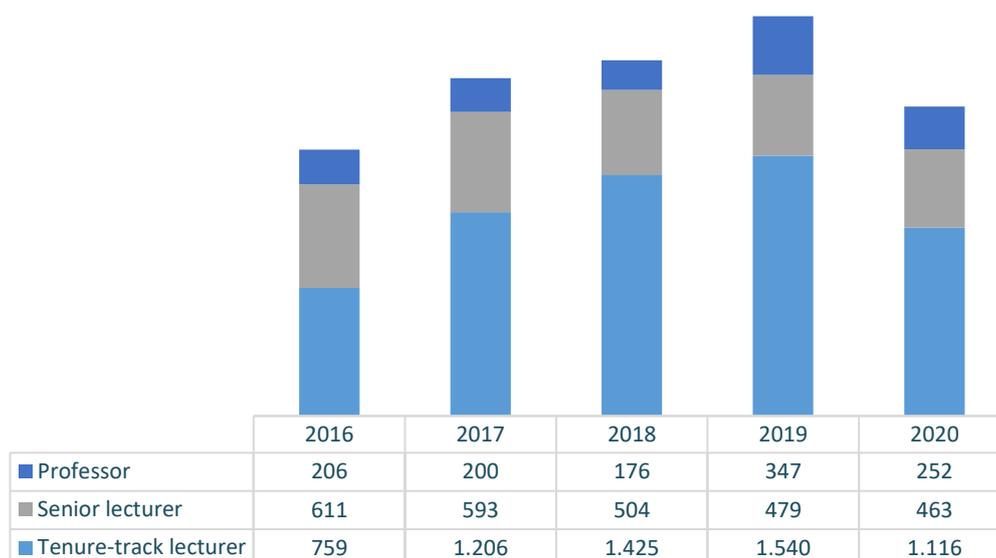
COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

premonitorily established the use of electronic means in the assessment, certification and accreditation by the Research Assessment Committee for those requesting assessment from the first calls of 2020. Consequently, the assessment process for all these applications submitted in 2020 has been electronic, from the application to the notification of the decision.

In the 2020 calls for tenure-eligible lecturers and research fellows, 451 applications were submitted through the SHP.

Since 2011 the number of applications received has doubled, which has represented a major organisational challenge for the CAR. In 2020, however, 1,831 applications were received – 22% less than in 2019 – breaking the growth trend of recent years.

Graphic 2. Trend in the number of applications from tenure-track lecturers, senior lecturers and professors (2016-2020)



Lecturer accreditation reports

Four calls for applications from tenure-eligible lecturers were launched in 2020: two ordinary calls and two specific ones for candidates applying through the Serra Húnter programme. A total number of 1,116 applications were received. This was a decrease of 27.5% compared to 2019.

Under the Serra Húnter programme, 438 applications were received in the two specific calls for applications launched in 2019, which was a decrease of 47.7% compared to the previous year.

The Research Assessment Committee (CAR) modified the general procedure for issuing lecturer accreditation reports, which, on a one-off basis, allows applicants who meet certain requirements to apply for a lecturer accreditation report at any time during the year.

Reports for non-permanent contract teaching staff under the Serra Húnter programme

New reports for non-permanent contract teaching staff began to be issued under the Serra Húnter programme for the first time in 2019. These reports are designed for teaching staff at public universities in Catalonia with a tenure-eligible lecturer contract within the framework of the Serra Húnter programme.

The eligibility requirements to apply for a report of this kind are a current contract as a tenure-eligible lecturer under the Serra Húnter programme and possession of a positive accreditation of research issued by AQU Catalunya.

The issuance of this report continued in 2020. The call was open throughout the year and fourteen applications were submitted, of which seven were successful, six were closed without evaluation and one is still in the process of evaluation.

Accreditation of research and advanced research

Four calls for applications for the accreditation of research and four calls for the accreditation of advanced research were launched in 2020: two ordinary calls for research accreditation and two specific ones for candidates applying through the Serra Húnter programme, together with two ordinary calls for advanced research accreditation and two specific ones within the framework of an agreement with the University of Navarra.

A total number of 463 applications for research accreditation and 252 applications for advanced research accreditation were received.

The total number of applications submitted to the calls for the accreditation of research and advanced research has decreased slightly with regard to 2019.

2.2. Accreditation of merits in research, teaching and management

Salary bonuses for public service and contract teaching and research staff at public universities in Catalonia are based on the assessment of individual merits in teaching, research and management

In the assessment of merits in teaching and in management, AQU Catalunya certifies that institutions have applied the corresponding assessment procedure in accordance with the regulations; and, with regard to six-year research quality premiums, in the case of regular (public service) staff it officially recognises previous assessments and in the case of contract staff carries out assessment.

For the first time in 2020, a specific call for recognition of the research, transfer and innovation premium assessed by the CNEAI was opened, giving a 44.3% increase in the number of requests for evaluation of civil servant teaching and research staff compared to the previous year. While 591 were submitted in 2019, 853 were submitted in 2020 as a result of the above-mentioned call.

As for the recognition of the ordinary research premium, in 2020 the CAR recognised 371 of these.

As for the recognition of the research, transfer and innovation premium, the CAR recognised 413 premiums.

Meanwhile, the number of requests for evaluation of contracted **teaching and research staff** has remained stable: 833 were submitted in 2019 and 835 in 2020.

Merits in research

AQU Catalunya directly assesses the individual merits in research of contract teaching and research staff on the basis of an established procedure and criteria and it has an agreement with the Spanish Research Assessment Commission (CNEAI) whereby it recognises the Commission's assessments of research work by regular (public service) staff who apply for this through the CNEAI.

Since 2017, when submitting applications, a web form can be filled in which, using an ORCID code, allows the applicant's contributions to be automatically uploaded if they are available on the Portal de la Recerca de Catalunya (Research Portal of Catalonia – PRC). This procedure makes it possible to validate the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), the category and the rank of those contributions present in the journals indexed in the Clarivate Analytics Journal Citation Reports, streamlining the processing of applications and the assessment task of the committees. Since the launch of this option on the PRC linked to AQU Catalunya procedures, almost 2,200 lecturers have learned about it and almost 1,500 people have uploaded data from the PRC.

The CAR has modified the evaluation criteria for research merits so that they are equivalent between contracted teaching and research staff (evaluated by AQU Catalunya) and civil servant

teaching and research staff (evaluated by ANECA, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation).

In 2020, the AQU Catalunya Research Assessment Committee approved the procedure and deadlines for the submission of applications for the recognition of the premium within the framework of the pilot project for the assessment of the transfer of knowledge and innovation of civil servant teaching and research staff at Catalan public universities, in accordance with Law 1/2003 of 19 February 2003 on Catalan universities.

This procedure is aimed at **teaching and research staff who are career civil servants at Catalan public universities**, who belong to one of the following categories of university faculty: university professor, university associate lecturer, professor at a university polytechnic, or associate lecturer at a university polytechnic, and who have received a favourable assessment for their research premium within the framework of the pilot project for the evaluation of the transfer of knowledge and innovation from the National Research Activity Assessment Committee (CNEAI) of the ANECA.

AQU Catalunya recognised all the premiums (413) that were submitted. Some research premiums could not be recognised as they were awaiting positive assessment of knowledge transfer and innovation premiums within the pilot project on assessment by the CNEAI.

The call for the recognition of research premiums has been carried out, within the framework of the pilot project for the evaluation of the transfer of knowledge and innovation of civil servant teaching and research staff.

Evaluation and award of research premiums by agreement

AQU Catalunya maintains different agreements to review and assess research and related activities of teaching and research staff at private universities in Catalonia, research staff at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), together with the following affiliated institutions:

Table 1. Affiliated institutions with agreements dealing with the evaluation and assessment of staff research premiums

University	School/institution
UB	EISJD - Escola d'Infermeria de Sant Joan de Déu
UB i UdL	INEFC - Institut Nacional d'Educació Física de Catalunya
UAB	EUSS - Escola Universitària Salesians de Sarrià
UPF	Barcelona School of Management
	ESIM - Escola Superior d'Infermeria del Mar
	Fundació TecnoCampus Mataró-Maresme
	IBEI - Fundació Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals*
UdG	ERAM - Escola Universitària ERAM
	EU Mediterrani - Escola Universitària Mediterrani
	EUSES - Escola Universitària de la Salut i l'Esport
UVic-UCC	BAU - Centre Universitari de Disseny de Barcelona
	ESERP - Escuela Superior de Ciencias Empresariales, Marketing i Relaciones Públicas

The criteria and procedures are the same as those used to assess and evaluate research by regular and contract teaching and research staff at public universities in Catalonia.

Table 2. Institutions that AQU has agreements with concerning evaluation for staff research premiums. 2020Results

Institució	T	NA	P	RP	TF	TD	% F
Private universities in Catalonia	143	12	11	2	100	20	76.3%
Affiliated/partner institutions	23	1	1	1	17	4	77.3%
Research staff at UPC	3	1	0	0	2	0	100%
Research staff at UAB	2	0	0	0	2	0	100%

Total	171	14	12	3	121	24	70.7%
--------------	------------	-----------	-----------	----------	------------	-----------	--------------

Certification of merits in teaching

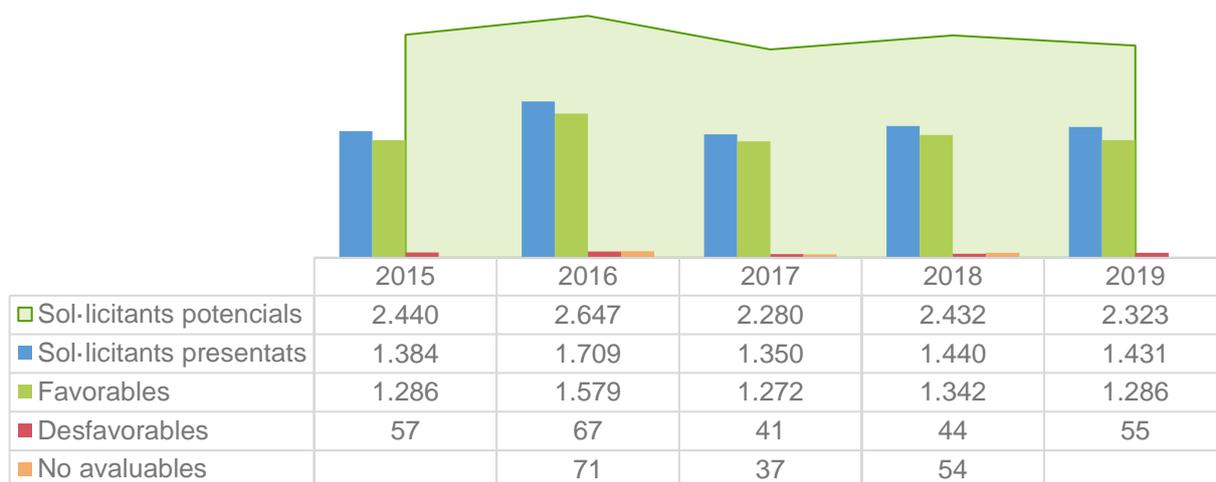
For the assessment of the teaching activity of teaching and research staff, Catalan universities apply the relevant AQU Catalunya-accredited teaching assessment handbooks in force. The Catalan universities send the Agency the evaluation reports on the teaching activity of teaching and research staff certified by the specific Committee for the Evaluation of Teaching and Management Activity in accordance with the Teaching Evaluation Handbooks.

In 2020, the following have been certified:

Table 3. Results of the 2019 call for the certification of merits in teaching

Potential no. applicants ³	Total no. applicants	Percentage applications	Positive	Unfavourable	Positive/ applications %	Positive/ potential %
2.323	1.431	61,6%	1.286	55	89,9%	55,4%

Graphic 3. Evolution of the assessment of merits in teaching (2015-2019)



Certificates of assessment of teaching activity (CAAD)

The certification/assessment of teaching activity is aimed at teaching staff with research and/or advanced research accreditation issued by AQU Catalunya⁴.

The certificate of teaching activity recognises that the applicant's teaching activity satisfies pre-established teaching requirements and can be considered by universities in their selection processes.

The evaluation body is the Specific Committee for Teaching and Management Activity.

The following table shows the teaching evaluation certificates obtained during the period 2015-2020.

Table 4. Teaching evaluation certificates (2015-2020)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Favourable	1	4	1	1	1	50
Non-assessable		1				

Merit-based assessment of skills in management

Universities in Catalonia assess the individual merits of both regular and contract teaching staff as regards their skills in management according to instructions endorsed by AQU Catalunya and the Directorate General for Universities for this procedure. Following the institution's assessment of teaching staff, the assessment reports are sent to the Agency, which certifies that assessment has taken place according to the guidelines.

Table 5. Results of the 2019 call for the certification of skills in management

6-year periods assessed	Positive	Withheld	1st period	2nd period	3rd period	4th period
282	281	1	103	61	70	47

The information in the table refers to 6-year periods of externally assessed skills in management, not the number of people.

⁴ Resolution UNI/1239/2004 of 26 April 2004 and Resolution UNI/3130/2005 of 28 October 2005.

3. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

3.1. Surveys and indicators of the higher education system in Catalonia

The transition into employment of graduates (surveys of graduate outcomes)

AQU Catalunya coordinates an on-going survey study of graduate employment outcomes in Catalonia that has been carried out once every three years since 2000. All public universities (through their social councils), private universities, affiliated institutions and institutions delivering Arts higher education programmes now participate in the survey study, which provides data and benchmarks on the quality of graduate employment outcomes in Catalonia.



During 2020, the Agency carried out its seventh study, which included up to seven different surveys, reaching a record number of 29,893 responses and representing around four out of ten people in the study population.

The activities carried out during 2020 are summarised in the following points:

- > **Fieldwork:** The survey fieldwork was carried out between January and July 2020. The COVID-19 health crisis has made it necessary to adapt the way we work, the timetable and also the questionnaire, in order to homogenise the responses collected before and after the outbreak of the pandemic and the resulting health measures, which have had a clear impact on the world of work. This edition is a pilot study for applying a combination of methodologies for the collection of responses in universities. The combination consists of an initial online questionnaire (CAWI) and a subsequent telephone questionnaire for non-responses (CATI). This methodology makes it possible to reduce the system resources invested and to adapt the survey to an increasingly digital world.
- > **Integration of databases:** On completion of the fieldwork, the responses were aggregated to the data from previous editions of the study in order to analyse trends.
- > Dissemination actions:
- > **Microdata dissemination:** preparation and dissemination of microdata tailored to each stakeholder group, with the aim of promoting and facilitating their use for research and integration into internal quality assurance systems. In particular, AQU Catalunya provides

the microdata to the participating universities and research groups that request it. In 2020, eight data packages were sent to research groups.

- > **Report preparation:** preparation and dissemination of the study reports (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees), which provide graphics and summaries of the main global results of the Catalan University System.
- > **Presentation seminar:** On 25 November, the [Conference for the presentation of the results of the 2020 Employment Outcomes survey](#) was held, with the results contrasted with subsequent data provided by Idescat, which incorporate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment situation of the surveyed group. The session, which was virtual, could be followed live on the Agency's Youtube channel.
- > **Web tools:** preparation of the data upload for updating the web tools for the dissemination of the results of the degree-by-degree study (EUC and EUC Data).

Employment outcomes of university graduates. Idescat population study

Idescat and AQU Catalunya have been working to provide longitudinal monitoring of labour market outcomes based on administrative data. A pilot study was conducted in 2018 using data from the 2017 employment outcomes survey, which confirmed both the feasibility of this analysis and the consistency between the data from the two types of follow-up.

In 2020, AQU Catalunya provided Idescat with the data on the employment outcomes of Bachelor's degree graduates of public universities in order to carry out the analysis. Idescat prepared a data preview so that, in November 2020, AQU could present the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment data.

Labour market integration from the point of view of employers

The "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, through the agreement it has signed with the Catalan Government, has worked with the Agency to carry out a study on graduate outcomes from the perspective of employers. This study, which complements the triennial survey of graduates of Catalan universities, aims to provide universities with information on employers' perceptions of the skills and university training of graduates. The aim is to enable universities to develop policies to improve the university system in terms of academic offering and training programmes, and thus bring university education into closer alignment with the labour market.

After the positive reception of the first edition of the Employers project by universities and also by business and industry in Catalonia, 2017 saw the start of the new edition of the project (2017 to 2020), in which some thirty organisations have collaborated, including Catalan universities and public and private institutions, both for obtaining the datasets and for adapting the sectoral surveys.

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

During 2020, the results of the sectors pending publication were released. Reports have been published for the fields of Design, Psychology, ICT, Construction, Nursing and Medicine, while an initial conference was held for the field of design, although the rest were cancelled temporarily due to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. However, two virtual meetings were organised for the fields of Psychology and ICT with the deans of the centres offering degrees in each of the fields in order to discuss the challenges for improving the associated degrees.

Table 6. Employers Project. Meetings and reports by sector

Activity	Report	Date and place	Format
Design	The opinion of employers regarding the education received by Design graduates	02/19/2020 - ELISAVA (UPF)	Face-to-face conference (85 people)
Psychology	The opinion of employers regarding the education received by Psychology graduates	05/29/2020 - Virtual	Virtual meeting (10 deans)
ICT	The opinion of employers regarding the education received by ICT graduates	22/06/2020 - Virtual	Virtual meeting (13 deans)

In addition, in the framework of REACU and with the collaboration of the quality agencies of the Basque Country, Andalusia, the Canary Islands, Castile and León and Aragon, a series of national webinars has been launched to analyse the challenges of university education according as expressed by employers. Two virtual congresses have been organised:

Table 7. Sector-specific webinars in collaboration with REACU

Activity	Webinars	Date and place	Format
Nursing	The case of university studies in Nursing	19/02/2020 - Virtual	Virtual conference (257 people)
Tourism	The case of university studies in Tourism	05/29/2020 - Virtual	Virtual conference (263 people)

As a result of these webinars, a document has been drawn up that includes the main conclusions and the challenges for improving the associated degrees, so that all stakeholders can take them into account.

Finally, the third edition of the project (2020-2022) was started last September and, like the previous one, consists of three phases: The first was to prepare the databases and questionnaires,

the second to carry out the fieldwork and prepare the reports, and the third to disseminate the results. During 2020, we began work to request the datasets from the universities and prepare the questionnaires.

Satisfaction survey of recent graduates and master's graduates

The purpose of the satisfaction survey is to assess the level of satisfaction of graduates with the teaching and learning process, the services and facilities and their learning outcomes and achievements following on from their time at university. The purpose is to provide comparable indicators that facilitate the identification of strong points and areas for enhancement in degree programmes.

In 2020, the fieldwork for 2018-2019 graduates was closed (Satisfaction 19), and the fieldwork for 2019-2020 graduates started (Satisfaction 20). Fieldwork is carried out between January and February.

A total of 14,468 Bachelor's, Master's and Arts Higher Education graduates were surveyed and the 12 public and private universities in the Catalan system, 39 affiliated centres and 11 Arts Higher Education centres took part. The cumulative degree results up to the 2018-2019 graduate cohort have been published on the [EUC Data](#) website, where you can consult the aggregated results of the last three graduate cohorts surveyed, with a sampling error equal to or less than 15%. AQU Catalunya managed the fieldwork at the centres of six of the 12 participating universities, as well as at 27 affiliated centres and 11 arts higher education centres.

In 2020, fieldwork began on the sixth edition of the satisfaction survey for bachelor's degrees, the fourth edition of the satisfaction survey for master's degrees at all universities in Catalonia, both public and private, and the second edition of the survey for arts higher education centres.

Via Universitària survey

Via Universitària is a project based on the Eurostudent survey, the purpose of which is to better understand the profile of university students and their quality of life in order to establish policies that best serve their needs and interests. The key factor in the project is equity, which means ensuring that all students can access and benefit from the educational experience regardless of social origin, age, gender, etc.

Xarxa Vives d'Universitats is the promoter of this programme, which, for the third time, comes under the technical direction of AQU Catalunya and is supported by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of Andorra, the Valencian Assessment and Forecasting Agency, and the Government of Catalonia.

Preparatory work for the fieldwork began in 2020, such as the revision of the questionnaire to adapt it to the new pandemic context that clearly affects university life, the definition and

collection of the study population, and the specification of technical aspects. The survey is scheduled to start on 1 February 2021.

Indicators for the higher education system in Catalonia

AQU Catalunya is well aware of the importance of indicators for decision-making in programme quality assurance and enhancement and the analysis of specific aspects of the higher education system. The Agency, in cooperation with the Secretariat for Universities and Research, provides HEIs with requisite indicators for the monitoring and accreditation of recognised degree programmes.

In 2020, AQU Catalunya updated its data system with the most recent indicators collected by the Secretariat for Universities and Research, as well as the different tools that make it possible to leverage this repository of indicators for the purposes of evaluation and decision-making. Progress was made in the design, maintenance and extension of the AQU Catalunya data model, which feeds into the different processes and instruments by combining data of different types.

3.2. Studies and reports

Graduate, Master's and Doctorate Employment Outcome Reports

Three reports have been published on the main labour market access results for university graduates, Master's graduates and PhDs in the Catalan higher education system. In this edition, the results presented do not include the effects of COVID-19 on the labour market, as the fieldwork was largely carried out prior to the pandemic. However, they do show the trend in terms of labour market access and satisfaction with studies:

- > Access to the labour market for graduates from Catalan universities 2020.
- > Access to the labour market for graduates of Master's degrees from Catalan universities 2020.
- > Access to the labour market for doctors who graduate from Catalan universities 2020.



Design cross-sectional assessment report

In 2020, AQU Catalunya carried out work to draw up the cross-sectional assessment report for Design studies within the Catalan university system. The purpose of the document is to provide a snapshot of the state of university education in Design at the Bachelor's level in Catalonia, as well as arts higher education in Catalonia – both qualifications with the same MECES (Spanish Higher Education Qualifications Framework) level – in order to contribute to their improvement. The report includes data on the context of design degrees, access to and enrolment on these courses, teaching staff, performance, employment outcomes, student satisfaction and, finally, information on the accreditation results of these university courses.

Reports on graduate outcomes from the perspective of employers

In 2020, six reports on employers' opinions on the training of graduates in design, psychology, ICT, construction, nursing and medicine were produced in the framework of the project on graduate outcomes from the perspective of employers.

Study exploring the use of machine learning in assessment processes

AQU Catalunya has started work using machine learning techniques to build an algorithm for teacher assessment processes in order to generate indicators that improve the consistency of the assessments and more quickly identify potential risks in the assessment process.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY



4. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

4.1. Knowledge transfer

EUC web portal (Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya)

EUC Studies



In 2020 the new portal [EUC Studies](#), was launched. This portal has a public part, aimed at society in general, specifically at future students, and a private part, designed to facilitate assessment processes both for the people within universities responsible for carrying out self-assessments and for the experts who work with the Agency to carry out external assessments.

EUC Studies disseminates the results of the quality assessment processes of official Catalan university degree, master’s and doctoral programmes.

The website includes the quality labels of the degrees and also the labels of the centres that have obtained institutional accreditation.

Over the course of the year, the portal received 22,480 visits from 17,399 users who viewed a total of 82,226 pages.

Work has also been started to improve the organic position of the website on the internet.

EUC Informes

The [EUC Informes](#) (QA documentation) web portal is the repository of all reports from the different QA reviews by the Agency of degree programmes delivered at universities in Catalonia and Arts higher education programmes that come under the Department of Education, as well as the reports from all institutional reviews carried out by the Agency.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY

In 2019 the portal held 6,123 reports, which was an increase of 15,9% compared to 2019, and received 4,019 visits by 2,660 users who visited a total of 16,115 pages.

EUC Dades

[EUC Dades](#) is a search engine of the data sources and outcomes of surveys carried out by the Agency up until the present time of graduate employment outcomes (graduate destinations) and the satisfaction of the recent graduate population with their degree studies. Indicators can be consulted according to course or subject. Durant l'any 2020 s'han incorporat els resultats de l'enquesta d'inserció laboral 2020 de graus i màsters, així com els resultats de l'enquesta de Satisfacció 2019 de graus.

The EUC Dades portal received 6,220 visits during the year by 3,718 users who visited a total of 25,804 pages.

Conferences

The conferences organised by AQU Catalunya, which are mainly aimed at the Catalan university community and the Catalan administration, are places where people can exchange knowledge with the aim of promoting and deepening the culture of quality and continuous improvement in the Catalan university system. During 2020, the Agency organised five conferences and helped to organise three more. These consisted of: three conferences to present the results of the **Employers project** (two of which were organised jointly with other quality agencies from the Spanish Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education); three in the framework of the Erasmus Skills4Employability **project**; one on **Open Access Catalan Journals** (divided into four sessions); and a conference to present the results of the **Employment Outcomes** project.

Challenges in university education in the field of Design



Aleix Carrió Hall, ELISAVA, Barcelona – 19 February 2020

The seminar resulted in the document [Conclusions and proposals for improvement from the seminar “Challenges in higher education in the field of Design”](#).

107 people signed up for the seminar.

The case of university studies in Nursing

Webinar – 30 September 2020

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY

The conference resulted in the document *[Challenges in university education according to employers. The case of nursing studies.](#)*

[Embedding soft skills at the University: Equipping Graduates for Employability](#)

Webinars – 7, 8 and 9 October 2020



For each of the sessions, 336, 333 and 29 people signed up, respectively.

[RACO \(Catalan Journals in Open Access\) conferences. Quality and visibility of journals.](#)



Webinars – 20 & 27 October and 3 & 10 November 2020

430 people signed up for the webinars.

[Presentation of the results of the 2020 Employment Outcomes survey](#)

Webinar – 25 November 2020

In this conference, the results of this study were presented and contrasted with subsequent data provided by Idescat, in order to incorporate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment situation of the group surveyed.

395 people signed up for the seminar.

[The case of university studies in Tourism](#)



Webinar – 2 December 2020

281 people signed up for the seminar.

Publications

AQU Catalunya published a total of 38 publications, 18 of which were original publications: the reports on the results of the survey on graduate outcomes from the perspective of employers, the reports on the results of employment outcomes from the perspective of graduates, the Standards and criteria for the institutional accreditation of university centres, the *Guide to ex-ante accreditation of joint programmes using the European Approach*, the Pilot Guidelines for the ex-ante accreditation of short-term programmes, and the revisions of the Guide to the accreditation of recognised doctoral (PhD) programmes, the Guide to the certification of internal quality assurance system implementation, and the Guide for the follow-up of arts higher education programmes. The AQU Catalunya Action Plan for 2020 and the AQU Catalunya Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility Annual Report 2019 were also published.

Of these publications, 17 were published in Catalan, 10⁵ in Spanish and 11⁶ in English (see annex 3).

4.2. Communication tools

AQU Catalunya has the following tools at its disposal to disseminate information on its activities: firstly, the AQU Catalunya corporate website and the specific websites EUC Studies, EUC Reports, EUC Data and WINDDAT; and secondly, the quarterly newsletter, the YouTube channel and a Twitter account. It also manages relations with the media.

Website

The AQU Catalunya corporate website is the main instrument for communicating the Agency's activities.

More than 12 years after the last version of the AQU Catalunya website, a new corporate website was launched in 2020.

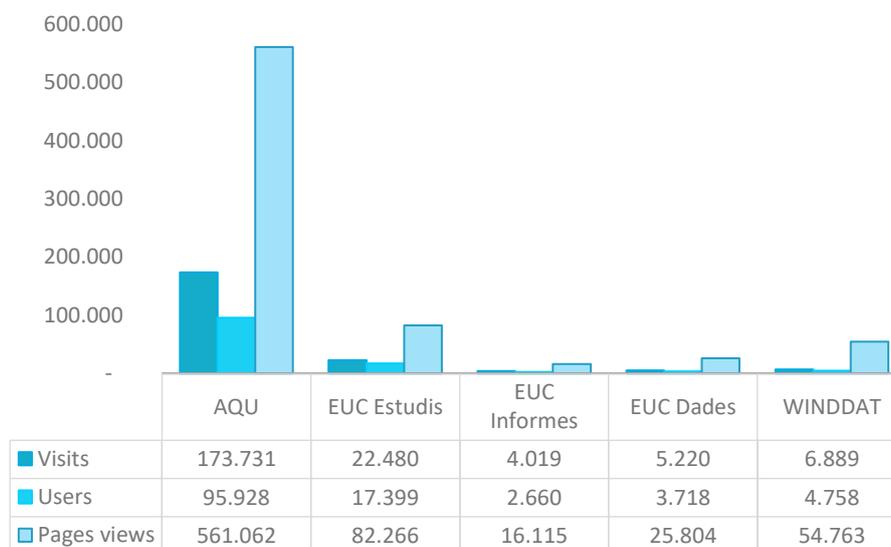
The approximate number of visits, users and page views for the corporate website and its subsites were as follows:

Graphic 4. Number of visits, users and page views on AQU Catalunya websites (2020)

⁵ One of the publications in Spanish “Perfiles del profesorado lector (2013-2017)” is the translation of a report published in 2019.

⁶ One of the publications in English, “Profiles of tenure-track lecturers (2013-2017)” is the translation of a report published in 2019.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY



Online newsletter (elButlletí)

The four issues for the year (numbers 96 to 99) of AQU's e-newsletter (*elButlletí*) were published and sent to 13,230 subscribers, which was an increase of 17% over the previous year's number of subscriptions.

Twitter

By the end of 2020 the AQU Catalunya Twitter account had 2,173 followers, which represented an 17.5% increase in the total number compared to 2019, and 333 tweets had been sent. In addition, there were 699 mentions of @aqucatalunya and approximately 7,500 profile visits.

YouTube

AQU Catalunya has a YouTube channel for the purpose of disseminating the activities it carries out and, where necessary, training experts. Since 2020, the channel has also been used to broadcast live webinars.

During 2020, the Agency published 20 videos on the YouTube channel, including videos the face-to-face workshops organised before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the webinars organised from March onwards.

This year, as a result of the need to disseminate the events in online format, the number of reproductions of AQU Catalunya videos on the YouTube channel has grown exponentially, by 144% compared to the previous year. As a result, in 2020 the videos on our YouTube channel received 7,915 views, with a cumulative total of 20,004 views.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY

The most viewed video was AQU Catalunya's [2020 Christmas Carol](#), with 1,415 views. In second place was [the first session of the RACO \(Catalan Journals in Open Access\) Conference](#), broadcast live on 20 October, with 990 views, and in third place, the session for the [presentation of results of the 2020 Employment Outcomes survey](#), also broadcast live on 25 November, with 905 views.

Media

During 2020, 20 print media citations were generated by AQU Catalunya.

COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE



5. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

5.1. Strategic management

Strategic Plan 2019-2022

AQU Catalunya's [Strategic Plan for 2019-2022](#), which was endorsed by the Governing Board in 2019, sets out the Agency's mission, vision, the values underpinning its new Code of Ethics, and its strategic priorities and action steps.

The strategic priorities and action steps set by the Governing Board for the four-year period from 2019-2022 are as follows:

- > Implement measures with innovative features that impact higher education and the university system in Catalonia.
- > Facilitate open access to quantitative and qualitative data for quality assurance and enhancement in the higher education system in Catalonia.
- > Consolidate the international position of both AQU Catalunya and universities in Catalonia.
- > Encourage and enable staff and external experts to maintain and develop their expertise and thereby enhance their commitment to working with the Agency and their ability to embrace change.
- > Maintain sufficient funding, human resources and office and workspace in order to meet the requirements of all planned activities.



In 2020, 46% of the actions envisaged in the Plan were implemented.

Assessment according to European Criteria and Guidelines

Every five years, if quality assurance agencies operating in Europe want their decisions to be recognised by the other European countries, they must pass an external evaluation that validates compliance with the [*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*](#) (2015) in the assessment processes they carry out.

In 2020, work continued to address the recommendations for improvement from the 2017 evaluation.

5.2. Governing, QA and advisory bodies

AQU Catalunya reaches its agreements through its corresponding governing and quality assurance bodies: the Governing Board and Standing Committee, the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), the Research Assessment Commission (CAR), and the Appeals Committee. The Agency also took into account the opinions of its advisory bodies, including the Advisory Committee, the Committee of Vice-rectors responsible for academic governance and quality, the University Councils and the representatives of private universities Committee, the University QA Units Committee, the Technical Committee for Surveys and the Student Advisory Committee.

As for the Appeals Committee, the appeals related to the university teaching staff assessment processes were resolved in 2020. As of 25 January 2021, a total of 239 have been submitted. With regard to the process of submitting supporting arguments regarding university degrees, three supporting arguments were received in 2020 for the issuance of review reports in the Verification process. Specifically, three review reports were issued regarding negative verification by the Spanish Universities Council, two of which were favourable, ratifying the previous favourable assessment of the specific AQU Catalunya committee, and one unfavourable, also ratifying the previous unfavourable assessment of the specific AQU Catalunya committee.

5.3. Expert assessment staff

The experts who participate in AQU Catalunya's assessment processes are both individuals of recognised prestige in the academic and/or professional spheres and students, taking into account the criteria of independence, objectivity and absence of conflict of interest. In addition, they must meet the requirements of ability and merit previously established by the assessment committees.

In 2020, AQU Catalunya's pool of experts received 364 new CVs, mostly academic, bringing the total number of experts to 2,215 (57% academics, 20% professionals and 23% students). In addition, the Agency has a database with more than 26,000 records, where potential experts can be found for the different assessment projects.

This year, 417 experts participated in the institutional and degree assessment processes, and 308 in the academic staff assessment processes, 45% of whom were women. It is worth noting the

COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

Agency's commitment to gender parity in the assessment committees, as well as to increasing the total number of women appointed as committee chairpersons.

Illustration1. Experts by gender (2020)



6. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

AQU Catalunya has carried out its **accountability process** and has been transparent with the actions carried out. It has also been very active in the **legal field**, drawing up the agreements, reports, resolutions and edicts necessary for the smooth running of the Agency's activities and taking part in the relevant administrative procurement procedures.

AQU Catalunya's **information quality and security management system**, which reached its 20th anniversary in 2020, also remained active. The external certification audit carried out by AENOR, in accordance with ISO 9001: 2015 and ISO 27001: 2013 standards, was passed satisfactorily.

In the field of **information and communication technologies**, the activities implemented included measures relating to e-administration; the development and implementation of the new EUC Studies web portal; improvements to the data model that underpins the surveys conducted by AQU Catalunya, the data from UNEIX and the results of accreditations; the launch of the new corporate website; the functional definition of the new GESTA, a unified system for the management of information on the assessments managed by the Quality Assessment Area; the development of the Internal Quality Indicator Management Module; improvements to the management of AQU Catalunya's activities through the continuous development of the NEXUS/Extranet/Icarus platforms; the international DEQAR CONNECT project; participation in the Machine Learning project; Office 365 applications; the change of address of AQU Catalunya's offices; the implementation of the CIRCUIT telephone system; compliance with the controls specified by the ISO 27002 standard; the acquisitions and upgrades needed to maintain our technological infrastructures; and support for the users of AQU Catalunya.

As for **financial and accounting management**, it should be noted that expenditure has been significantly reduced given that the assessment processes carried out during the pandemic were changed from a face-to-face to a remote format.

This need for remote activities has made it necessary to immediately begin work on the digitalisation of the Financial Management processes, coinciding with adaptation to the important changes resulting by the implementation of the new General Public Chart of Accounts of the Catalan Government and the implementation of PANGEA, the Catalan Government's new corporate financial management application.

The Agency has periodically submitted its accounts to the Directorate-General for Financial Policy, the Comptroller General, the Directorate-General for Universities and the General Secretariat of the Department of Economy and Knowledge, as well as to the Public Audit Office (Sindicatura de Comptes). This accountability process has been stepped up throughout 2020 and has been affected by the urgent and extraordinary measures related to COVID-19, as discussed above.

In addition, AQU Catalunya moved its offices to its new headquarters on 14 and 15 July.

Finally, as regards the AQU Catalunya **registry**, an official Government registry, it registered 245 records in-person in 2020, 96% less than the previous year.

COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES



7. ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL AGENTS IN CATALONIA

Within the system of higher education in Catalonia, the Agency maintained relations mainly with:

- > the Secretariat for Universities and Research, with which it participated in the preparation of the National Pact for the Information Society;
- > with the Inter-university Council of Catalonia, where it participated in the Committee for Academic Programming and Governance, the Academic Staff Committee, the Women and Science Committee and the General Conference; and the working group for the 2030 Agenda.
- > with the universities and other higher education institutions in Catalonia, dealing with matters as requested.
- > Different networks such as CIDUI, GUNI, CSUC, the Vives network or Open Science Movement (promoted by the European Commission).
- > The Catalan universities' student councils.

It also maintained relations with different bodies in different departments of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya):

- > The Department of Education, for the management of the assessment and quality of arts higher education.
- > with the Professional Training Council of Catalonia (*Consell Català de Formació Professional*), to take part in the Internal Planning and Forward Studies working group. During 2020, it helped to draft the document "[Basis for the Catalan model for the prospection of professional training and qualification needs](#)".
- > with the Department of the Presidency's Directorate General for Analytical and Forward Studies, in the development of a forward planning round table-workshop;

COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES

- > The Directorate-General for the Civil Service, for the cataloguing of university degrees that may be open to public calls for applications.
- > with the Department of Health in the Professional Dialogue Forum (FDP), to align planning and professional management policies;
- > The Directorate-General for Planning in the field of Universities and Research.
- > and with the Institut Català de les Dones (the Catalan institute that designs, promotes and coordinates policy concerning women in society) and the Inter-university Council of Catalonia, in the third survey carried out from a gender perspective on the differences in the quality of employment outcomes between male and female graduates twenty years after graduation.
- > Idescat (the Statistical Institute of Catalonia).

It also maintained relations with social agents to promote the Employers project, and with Barcelona City Council to support it in the guidance sessions it organises, with the College of Physiotherapists of Catalonia for the development of assessment, certification and accreditation activities, and with secondary schools to present the quality of qualifications in Catalonia.

8. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

AQU Catalunya continued participating in REACU, the national body that coordinates the network of higher education QA agencies in Spain, and maintained its relations with other higher education QA agencies in Spain. An agreement was signed in 2020 with the University of Navarra to undertake teaching staff assessment and accreditation procedures.

9. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

9.1. International institutional relations

The main organisations that AQU Catalunya maintained relations with in 2020 were as follows:

INQAAHE

AQU Catalunya hosted the Secretariat of the [International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education](#) (INQAAHE) for the seventh consecutive year. The Agency's activities as host of the organisation's Secretariat focus on three main areas:

- **Support for the Governing Board.**
- **Support for the members.**
- **Economic management.**



Detailed information on the network's activities during 2019 is given in the *INQAAHE Annual Report 2020*, produced by AQU Catalunya.

ENQA

AQU Catalunya has been a full member of the [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education](#) (ENQA) since the association was founded in 2000.

On 22 October, a member of the AQU Catalunya staff, Ms Núria Comet, was appointed as a member of the ENQA Appeals and Complaints Committee.

EQAR



The [European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education](#) (EQAR) is a register of QA agencies that have demonstrated substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. AQU Catalunya has been registered with EQAR since 5

December 2008 and was one of the first three QA agencies to be listed on the register.

9.2. International projects, reviews and exchange

Skills4Employability (in progress, started in 2019)

[Skills4Employability – Enhancing the presence of soft skills in Higher Education curricula](#)

The Skills4Employability project is an Erasmus+ project led by CONEXX (Belgium), in which AQU Catalunya, the Sapienza University (Rome, Italy), the Politehnica University (Bucharest, Romania) and the Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania) all participate as partners.

The aim of the project is to help universities enhance the quality of higher education through the introduction of soft skills in curricula and assess the degree to which these match the skills relevant to employers' needs in the labour market.

Structured indicators to manage HEI Quality System (SMART-QUAL) (ongoing, started in 2020)

In 2020, work was begun on the project *Structured indicators to manage HEI Quality System (SMART-QUE)*, funded by the Erasmus+ programme [Key Action 2] and coordinated by CONEXX-EU (Belgium), and in which AQU participates.

Over the next two and a half years, the Agency, together with 8 other partners, will work to design a set of internationally harmonised indicators for internal quality assurance systems.

Based on the review and compilation of different existing proposals, the project's challenge is to develop a *Quality Indicators Scoreboard* that will become a reference framework for harmonising quality assurance processes at the international level. The project also aims to build a roadmap for the implementation of these quality assurance system indicators and to improve efficiency in the short and long terms. The initial results are expected in 2021.

Universities and quality agencies from up to five different European countries are involved in this project:

The Belgium-based international cooperation body [CONEXX-EU](#), as the coordinating entity.

COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES

Quality agencies: SKVC, [Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education](#) (Lithuania) and A3ES, [Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior](#) (Portugal).

Universities: [Universidade do Minho](#) and [Universidade de Aveiro](#) (Portugal), [Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#) (Belgium), [Politecnico di Torino](#) (Italia), and UIC – [Universitat Internacional de Catalunya](#) (Spain).

CHARM-EU (in progress, started in 2019)

[Challenge-driven, Accessible, Research-based, Mobile European University](#)

On 26 June 2019 the European Commission announced that the CHARM-EU project (Challenge-driven, Accessible, Research-based, Mobile European University) was one of several chosen to form part of the 'European Universities' initiative

The University of Barcelona/UB is the institution leading the project in an alliance consisting of the Loránd Eötvös University (Budapest), Trinity College Dublin, the University of Montpellier and Utrecht University. AQU Catalunya is an associate member of the project.

The project proposes an innovative pedagogical approach that consists of a series of learning modules (regarded as credit packs) for a group of between 100 and 200 students from the five participating universities to receive an interdisciplinary, challenge-based education consisting of multidisciplinary credits.

The objective is to change academic provision through a more cross-disciplinary approach that offers a multi-disciplinary learning experience to students. The cross-curricula nature of academic provision will be highly flexible and allow students to personalise their education.

Employability in Programme Development (EPD) (on-going, starting in 2020)

The project Employability in Programme Development (EPD) aims to establish mechanisms to inform the design and development of training programmes and improve the employability of graduates. The final interest group in the project is the teaching staff, as the aim is to incorporate employability through changes in teaching practice. To inform academics, there will be intermediate units to help the academic community (employment services, quality units, employment science institutes, etc.).

The following partners are involved in this project: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Reading, the University of Glasgow and AQU Catalunya.

Complex Trajectories (Complex) (on-going, started in 2020)

The Complex Trajectories project aims to understand the increasingly diverse and complex trajectories of students at university, and to support those who follow them. In order to do this, the project will define a system for monitoring students' trajectories that will allow the development of both institutional and university support policies. In this respect, it is proposed

that analysis of trajectories be based, not the programme (graduation rates, etc.), but on the student.

The project partners are: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitat de València, Université de Bourgogne, The Open University, University of Alberta, Universidade do Porto and the Government of Catalonia's Secretariat for Universities and Research. AQU Catalunya is an associate partner.

Andorra Assessment Reports

AQU Catalunya and AQUA, the Andorran Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, signed an addendum to the Framework Partnership Agreement between the two institutions for the accreditation and renewal of degrees in Andorra. In accordance with this addendum, AQU Catalunya will issue assessment reports to AQUA for the purposes it deems appropriate, with AQUA then issuing the final verification and accreditation report.

In 2020, the ex-ante assessment of the Bachelor's Degree in Design and the Bachelor's Degree in Organisational Engineering was carried out. An external committee for the accreditation of the Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science was also set up and trained, but this assessment was finally stopped after the degree programme was scrapped.

Exchange

AQU Catalunya has actively participated in meetings, forums and projects that are considered to add value to the Catalan university system as a whole and which enable it to learn and pass on information on activities in the international sphere in order to keep abreast of developments in the field of quality. In particular, the Agency has presented 16 papers at international meetings (see Annex 2).

Of these presentations, four were part of international projects in which AQU Catalunya collaborates, five were given within the framework of quality agencies, mainly on the subject of virtual visits, two within the framework of two Catalan universities, and the rest were given to associations or organisations that had requested input from AQU Catalunya on issues related to university quality.

COMMITMENT TO SAFE AND ETHICAL WORKING CONDITIONS



10. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

10.1. Human resources

In 2020, the implementation of the Training Plan continued, with the aim of aligning training with AQU Catalunya's strategy and adapting internal human resources policies to the new ISO 9001 standard and the competency framework established by ENQA.

Work also continued on the study to define the remote working model that can be implemented at the Agency, and approval was given to the Protocol for the prevention and handling of sexual and gender-based harassment in AQU Catalunya.

Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya

June 2021 · AQU-32-2021



 www.aqu.cat

 [@aqucatalunya](https://twitter.com/aqucatalunya)