



Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
de Catalunya

AQU CATALUNYA CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARISED VERSION

2019



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BARCELONA, 2020

© Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari
de Catalunya

C. d'Enric Granados, 33
08007 Barcelona

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OVERVIEW

This document is a summarised version of the *AQU Catalunya Corporate Social Responsibility Annual Report for 2019*, which covers the main activities undertaken by the Agency over the course of the year, the most important of which are described below.

One significant new development is that this annual report is now structured according to the commitments that the Agency accepts to corporate social responsibility (CSR) instead of the main strategic priorities according to which its activities are classified. Each of these commitments is in turn linked to several of the sustainable development goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments that we identified for AQU Catalunya in 2019, together with the main strategic priorities corresponding to each commitment, are as follows:

- **COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION.** This encompasses actions and activities undertaken to improve and enhance the system of universities and higher education in Catalonia:
 - > Institutional quality.
 - > Quality assurance of teaching.
 - > Knowledge generation and transfer.
- **COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY.** This encompasses measures undertaken by the Agency to transfer the outcomes of its activities to society:
 - > Knowledge transfer.
 - > Communication instruments.

- **COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE.** This covers measures adopted by AQU Catalunya to transparently ensure that it satisfactorily addresses its corporate social responsibility goals:
 - > Strategic management.
 - > External experts.
 - > Internal organisation.
- **COMMITMENT TO ALLIANCES.** This covers actions and activities undertaken by AQU Catalunya to engage with social agents in Catalonia, together with its institutional relations at both national and international level, to promote awareness of these measures and the quality enhancement of higher education:
 - > Engagement with social agents in Catalonia.
 - > Institutional relations at national level.
 - > International institutional relations.
- **COMMITMENT TO SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE AND ETHICAL WORKING CONDITIONS.** This encompasses measures undertaken to enhance staff commitment and motivation at work and their ability to embrace change:
 - > Human resources.

I take this opportunity to recognise that all of this year's achievements would have been impossible without the commitment of the Agency's staff, the experience of the review panel and committee members and the trust that the universities and social agents placed in us.

A big thanks to all of you!

Martí Casadesús Fa
Director

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY

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:

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Graph 1 Developments in validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation (2015-2019)¹



During 2019, AQU's Institutional and Programme Review Committee (CAIP) endorsed a series of changes to the guides used for validation, monitoring and accreditation to bring them in line with current regulatory aspects; for their adaptation to inclusive language, the gender perspective and e-learning; and to reinforce the student-centred approach to courses.

¹ Including bachelor's-equivalent Arts higher education programmes.

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As a result of the adoption of the [General framework for gender mainstreaming \(incorporating the gender perspective\) in higher education](#) (2018), the Agency updated the assessment guides during 2019 and, in agreement with the universities, established the timetable for review and assessment for validation, with new programme specifications from 1 January 2020 onwards; modification, with the submission of applications in February-March 2020; and for accreditation, the self-assessment site visits report in 2021. The Framework was also presented in different higher education forums to ensure a full understanding on the part of institutions.

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 63 proposals were submitted for validation by universities in Catalonia in 2019: 20 first degrees/bachelors, 37 masters and 6 doctoral programmes. 96% of all the proposals submitted for validation were successful: 94% of the first degrees/bachelors, 97% of the masters and 100% of the doctoral/PhD programmes. 79% of the proposals were for new degrees and 21% were a repeat (ex-ante) accreditation of existing degrees.

96% of proposals submitted for ex-ante accreditation were successful. 79% were new degree courses, while 21% were repeat (ex-ante) accreditations of existing degrees.

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

In 2019, the Agency monitored programmes that had been previously accredited and granted accreditation that was conditional. Out of a total of 44 programmes at 22 faculties and schools, 25 were first degrees/bachelors, 9 masters, 1 higher vocational programme and 9 Arts higher education master's programmes.

As for applications to **modify** currently running courses of study, 258 proposals to make modifications in the 2019-2020 academic year were received in 2019: 88 first degrees/bachelors, 133 masters and 37 doctoral/PhD programmes.

In overall terms, 99% of the modification applications were accepted: 100% in the case of first degrees/bachelors, 99% in masters and 94% in doctoral/PhD programmes.

Accreditation

Accreditation involves an ex-post assessment procedure that establishes, by way of a site visit, that delivery of a degree programme takes place in accordance with the programme specification. All recognised degree courses must undergo accreditation within six years of validation (or within six years of a previous accreditation) in the case of first degrees/bachelors and doctoral/PhD degrees, and four years in the case of master's degrees.

The universities and AQU Catalunya jointly plan the site visits each year according to the degree programmes that are due for accreditation.

Site visits

During 2019, 89 external site visits were organised to review and evaluate the delivery of 166 degree programmes, which was 18% more than the previous year. Eight (8) of these were first degrees/bachelors, 127 masters, 28 doctoral/PhD programmes, and 3 were Arts higher education programmes. A total number of 76 external review panels were convened.

In order to ensure that the work of the external review panels ran smoothly and effectively with consistent application of the criteria, a series of six in-person training sessions were held for new members of the first degree and masters review panels, in which 67 people took part. One training session was also held for members of the doctoral/PhD review panels, in which 17 people took part, and there was one session for members of the review panels dealing with the Arts higher education programmes, in which 12 people took part.

A training session for new external secretaries was also held, which was attended by 15 people who then took part in the external review panels during 2019. All together, 111 people received in-person training in programme accreditation.

Accreditation reports

During 2019, higher education institutions submitted 175 applications and AQU Catalunya issued 86 accreditation reports for recognised degree programmes. 17% of the programmes granted accreditation received a qualification of on-track-to-excellence and in 17% 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.

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Table 1. Accreditation reports issued by the specific subject and programme review panels (2019)

	<i>Accreditation withheld</i>	<i>Conditional accreditation</i>	<i>Accreditation</i>	<i>Accreditation on-track-to-excellence</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>On-track-to-excellence accreditation (%)</i>
Arts and Humanities		1	6	2	9	22%
Social Sciences and Law		9	27	3	39	8%
Experimental Sciences			2		2	0%
Health Sciences		2	12	2	16	13%
Engineering and Architecture		3	5	2	10	20%
PhD/doctoral programmes			4	6	10	60%
Total		15	56	15	86	17%

Since 2015, AQU Catalunya has accredited 873 degree programmes, which account for 62% of the total number of programmes introduced in Catalan universities (1,405). In the period from 2015-2019 the outcomes were as follows:

Table 2. Accreditation reports issued by the review panels (2015-2019)

	<i>Accreditation withheld</i>	<i>Conditional accreditation</i>	<i>Accreditation</i>	<i>Accreditation on-track-to-excellence</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>On-track-to-excellence accreditation (%)</i>
Arts and Humanities	0	8	86	23	117	19%
Social Sciences and Law	0	57	235	54	346	16%
Experimental Sciences	0	1	58	25	84	30%
Health Sciences	0	13	86	15	114	13%

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Engineering and Architecture	1	16	130	23	170	14%
PhD/doctoral programmes	0	18	9	15	42	36%
Total	1	113	604	155	873	18%

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.

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.

Four universities (three public and one private) applied for institution-wide IQAs certification during 2019, three of which were positive. External site visits were also made to eight faculties and schools within the context of the certification procedure of their IQAs, all of which had a positive outcome.

Two training sessions for members of the external review panels were also organised, in which 12 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 2019, the ESADE Business Management and Administration School, the ESADE Faculty of Law and the Blanquerna Faculty of School of Psychology, Education and Sport Sciences, each of which forms part of the Ramon Llull University, all obtained positive reports for institutional accreditation.

As faculties and schools will need to renew accreditation once every five years, AQU Catalunya began work on developing the methodology for the renewal of accreditation, together with a new guide for the development and consolidation of the institutional accreditation process.

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 2019, AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Review Committee (CAIP) approved the external review report on research at the University of Barcelona/UB's Department of Mathematics and Computer Science following the evaluation procedure laid down in the [Guide to university research assessment at department level](#), the overall outcome of which was excellent.



The Institutional and Programme Review Committee amended the guide in 2019 to include a section in which the department being assessed must state its ten most important scientific contributions during the period under review.

1.4. Support for the internationalisation of Catalan universities

AQU Catalunya recognises the internationalisation of degrees programmes delivered at Catalan institutions to be an important area in which to promote excellence in higher education. The Agency uses two mechanisms to support this: internationalisation as an additional dimension in programme accreditation and programme certification according to subject (thematic certification).

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.

The initial stage saw AQU Catalunya carry out a comparative study of the programme accreditation models used by the Agency and the WFME model in particular, and it drew up a first draft of a Guide to international accreditation for bachelor's degrees in Medicine, which combines the criteria set by both organisations.

Thematic certification of programmes

In line with the [Framework for the position of AQU Catalunya regarding subject-specific quality labels](#), AQU Catalunya carried out an integrated assessment for both programme accreditation and EUROMASTER international certification of the Master's degree programme in Pharmaceutical Chemistry and the Master's programme in Analytical Chemistry at Ramon Llull University. This process was organised jointly with the Accreditation Agency Specialised in Accrediting Degree Programmes in Engineering (ASIIN) in Germany.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING

2.1. Pre-selection teacher accreditation

Eligibility for selection for a contract teaching post at a public university in Catalonia requires that applicants must, for the category of tenure-track (pre/non-career grade) lecturer, be in possession of a positive pre-selection report and, for the categories of senior lecturer (*agregat*) and professor, an accreditation of research or advanced research, respectively.

Two calls for applications have typically been made every year for the positions of tenure-eligible lecturer, senior lecturer and professor. In 2019, however, the number of calls increased due to cooperation with the Government of Catalonia's Executive Council (*Govern*) in one call for applications to the Serra Húnter programme for the recruitment of high quality contract teaching staff: two ordinary calls and two calls under the Serra Húnter programme that were launched for pre-selection reports for tenure-track lecturers; two ordinary calls and two calls under the Serra Húnter programme for the accreditation of research; and two ordinary calls plus two calls under an agreement with the University of Navarra for the accreditation of advanced research.

2,384 applications were received in 2019, 13% more than in 2018, due to the pull factor of the Serra Húnter programme

All of these applications were assessed by the Agency's Research Assessment Committee (CAR).

A total number of 847 applications for teaching staff and research accreditation were made through the Serra Húnter programme in calls for applications launched 2019.

The number of applications has doubled since 2011, which has led to the processing of calls and notification taking longer.

In 2019 the Research Assessment Committee revised the texts of the documents on Criteria for lecturer accreditation reports, Criteria for research accreditation and Criteria for advanced research accreditation, in order to check the consistency of the wording and employ inclusive

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language.

In 2019 AQU Catalunya issued its [reply to the Declaration for change in the criteria of AQU Catalunya](#) (declaration signed by academics from various universities), in response to the concerns of all the interest groups and to seek the most appropriate solutions to improving and enhancing the system of higher education in Catalonia.

Graph 2. Trend in the number of applications from tenure-track lecturers, senior lecturers and professors (2015-2019)



Lecturer accreditation reports

Four calls for applications from tenure-eligible lecturers were launched in 2019: two ordinary calls and two specific ones for candidates applying through the Serra Húnter programme. A total number of 1,540 applications were received. This was an increase of 8% compared to 2018 and 65% of the applications were successful.

Under the Serra Húnter programme, 838 applications were received in the two specific calls for applications launched in 2019, which was an increase of 19.4% 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. This measure covers exceptional circumstances in which candidates lack sufficient time to apply to AQU Catalunya for the corresponding report within the time limits of ordinary calls for applications.

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 call for applications for these reports was kept open from 8 February until the end of the year. 18 applications were received, all of which were considered to be "apt".

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 2019: 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

347 applications for advanced research accreditation were received in 2019, 97.2% more than in the previous year

specific ones within the framework of an agreement with the University of Navarra.

A total number of 479 applications for research accreditation and 347 applications for advanced research accreditation were received. The percentage of positive outcomes was 59% and 69%, respectively.

The total number of applications submitted to the calls for the accreditation of research and advanced research went up by 21.5% compared to 2018.

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. In the case of contract staff, the number of applications rose from 731 in 2018 to 833 in 2019, an increase of 14%.

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.

In 2019, 591 applications were submitted to the call for regular teaching and research staff and 611 applications to the call for

AQU's Research Assessment Committee (CAR) agreed to make the assessment criteria for merits in research the same for both contract staff (assessed by AQU Catalunya) and regular staff (assessed by ANECA)

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contract teaching and research staff at public universities. The outcomes were 98.9% and 90.8% positive, respectively.

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 3. 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 and 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 and Relaciones Públicas*

* New agreements signed in 2019.

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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 4. Institutions that AQU has agreements with concerning evaluation for staff research premiums. Results 2019

Institution	T ²	NA	F	D	RP	TF	TD	% F
Private universities in Catalonia	168	21	127	20	0	127	20	86.4%
Affiliated/partner institutions	50	13	28	9	0	28	9	75.7%
Research staff at UPC	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	100.0%
Total	219	34	156	29	0	156	29	84.3%

Merit-based assessment of teaching: teaching assessment handbooks

A Resolution was issued in 2019 notifying the public universities in Catalonia of the procedure for renewing the accreditation of their teaching assessment handbooks, and the universities produced their self-assessment reports.

Table 5. Results of the 2018 call for the certification of merits in teaching

Potential no. applicants ³	Total no. applicants	Percentage applications	Positive	Unfavourable	Positive/applications %	Positive/potential %
2,432	1,440	59.2%	1,342	44	93.2%	55.2%

² T - total applications; NA - no evaluation; F - positive; D - withheld; RP - appeals pending; TF - total positive; TD - total withheld; % F: percentage of positive out of the total

³ The number of potential applicants includes teaching staff from previous calls for applications with the option to participate in the 2018 call.

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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 6. Results of the 2018 call for the certification of skills in management

6-year periods assessed	Positive	Withheld	1st period	2nd period	3rd period	4th period
266	266	0	91	73	57	45

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

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 2019 the Agency focused on preparing the seventh edition of the survey, which was started in early 2020 with an anticipated sample of more than 30,000 people.



The activities carried out during 2019 were as follows:

- **Initial projections of the population and institutions that will take part in the survey study.** Preliminary work was carried out together with faculties and schools to refine the projected group of study programmes to be surveyed.
- **Revision of the seven questionnaires that form part of the survey** in order to make them simpler, more direct and efficient and improve the response rate; introduce new items, such as the reasons for dissatisfaction with a degree programme and/or institution; and systematise the coding of indicators.
- **Preparation of the stages prior to the launch of the fieldwork** for the 2020 graduate outcomes survey; the conducting and award of a tender for the contract to carry out the fieldwork; database management; revision of the application for gathering responses and calculating quotas; and records management.

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- An archival integration of the total populations from all survey studies from 2001 until 2017, which is necessary for the management and maintenance of the data model in relation to the quality indicators for study programmes.
- Consolidation and fulfilment of the data protection and privacy requirements of the survey study.
- Promotion of the third survey study of gender differences in graduate employment outcomes, twenty years after graduation, jointly 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.

IDESCAT population-based survey of graduate destinations

Starting in 2018, AQU Catalunya, with the help of the Statistics Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT), has promoted a survey of graduate destinations based on the registration details of the baseline population of graduates given in available censuses.

In 2019 IDESCAT's production department, with the support of AQU Catalunya, worked on producing the graduate outcome reports using administrative data for the 2020 survey, using the same cohort surveyed by AQU Catalunya.

The employers' perspective of graduate employment outcomes and employability

Through an agreement signed with the Government of Catalonia, La Caixa Bank Foundation cooperates together with the Agency in carrying out a survey study of the transition to employment of graduates from the point of view of employers. The purpose of the study and accompanying survey, which complement the three-yearly survey of the employment outcomes of graduates of universities in Catalonia, is to give universities insight into prevailing perceptions in the labour market regarding the skills, education and training of graduates after completing their studies at university.

During 2018 the fieldwork in the form of an online survey with telephone back-up was carried out in fifteen sectors associated with the corresponding subject areas and/or degree programmes. A sample of 3,153 responses was obtained from a reference population of 38,591 enterprises.

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Work continued in 2019 with the preparation of reports and presentations at respective round table-workshops. A document was also drawn up for each sector with the main conclusions of the workshops, together with the challenges of improving and enhancing associated degree programmes, for consideration by the stakeholders.

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.

Work started in 2019 on the fieldwork for the fifth graduate satisfaction survey and the third master's graduate satisfaction survey of all public and private universities in Catalonia and, for the first time, eleven (11) institutions delivering Arts higher education programmes, for which the satisfaction questionnaires were adapted for graduates of Arts higher education first degree and master's programmes.

The aggregate results for first/bachelor degrees up until the 2017-2018 cohort are available on the [EUC Dades](#) web portal, which in the last three survey cohorts had a sample error equal to or less than 15%.

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 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.

The driving group behind the project consists of the Xarxa Vives d'Universitats (the Vives network of universities), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Andorra, La Caixa Bank Foundation and AQU Catalunya, which is responsible for technical supervision of the project.

Fieldwork for the survey was carried out in twenty (20) universities in the Vives Network in 2018, together with the analysis of the results, by six inter-university research teams. The [results and findings](#) of the [Via Universitària: access,](#)

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learning environments, expectations and the returns on higher education (2017-2019) report were presented in May 2019.

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.

During 2019 AQU Catalunya pursued two areas of activity: on the one hand, it continued its cooperation with the Secretariat for Universities and Research to maintain the indicators that form part of the UNEIX information system and, on the other, it worked on integrating the WINDDAT indicators from UNEIX that are used to monitor programme delivery, into the new EUC Estudis portal.

Given the large number of key indicators now available to AQU Catalunya, an indicator manager was also developed to catalogue all of the available indicators from both UNEIX and the surveys managed by the Agency to provide access from one single platform with a direct link using reporting software.

3.2. Studies and reports

Customised reports for higher education institutions

AQU Catalunya produced a customised report for each HE institution from data currently available at the Agency on programme review, teaching staff assessment and opinion studies, with a comparison with the mean data for Catalonia. The purpose of these reports is to facilitate consultation and decision making for university authorities. The reports were delivered to the rectors of all public and private universities in Catalonia as well as the vice-rectors responsible for quality at each institution.

Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework

In 2019, the Agency's Institutional and Programme Review Committee (CAIP) established the [Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework \(CHE-QF\)](#).

The framework, which is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Spanish Higher Education Qualifications Framework (MECES), is an instrument that addresses needs and requirements identified in the higher education system, such as improvements to the design and review of degree programmes. The framework has two principal aims: to facilitate lifelong learning and promote mobility and the recognition of academic education and training at both national and international level.

The Framework was developed under the coordination of AQU Catalunya by a group of national and international experts and representatives of the Department of Education, with financial support from INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education).



Teaching staff accreditation success profiles

In 2019 the Research Assessment Committee approved [Profiles of tenure-track lecturers \(2013-2017\)](#), a report based on an analysis of the CVs of tenure-eligible candidates who obtained a favourable accreditation report in the period between 2013-2017.

1,675 CVs of successful candidates (out of a total of 2,438 teaching dossiers submitted) were analysed using automated data buffering to provide a comprehensive overview of the necessary merits for success with accreditation. It is worth pointing out that the sample of CVs analysed (78%) was very high, meaning that the information is highly representative.

The report sets out, for each subject area, the quantitative profile of merits mainly in journals and publications (indexed articles, book chapters, written and oral presentations at symposia and congresses, and publications according to quartile), research projects (competitive projects in which the candidate has either been the principal researcher or participated in) and accredited periods of research



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(with the number and duration of research stays at both pre- and post-doctoral level) of people who on average obtained a favourable report in the accreditation procedure for tenure-eligible lecturers.

Other reports

AQU Catalunya, together with other QA agencies in higher education in Spain, contributed to the [2018 Report on the state of external quality assurance and higher education institutions in Spain](#).

The report, which has been published each year for more than a decade, analyses the impact of external quality assurance throughout the year and addresses the enhancement of QA procedures and their outcomes.

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4. KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

4.1. Knowledge Transfer

EUC web portal (*Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya*)

AQU Catalunya publishes the outcomes and findings of its various quality assurance procedures on the different webpages of the EUC portal:

■ EUC Estudis

The [EUC Estudis](#) web portal disseminates the outcomes of quality assurance procedures involving all recognised first degrees, master's and (since 2019) PhD programmes delivered in higher education institutions in Catalonia. The portal includes quality labels awarded to programmes and, since 2019, quality labels awarded to faculties and schools that have obtained institutional accreditation.

During 2019 bookmarks were used to promote the portal in secondary schools and the Saló de l'Ensenyament (Education Fair). During the year the portal received 26,040 visits by 19,350 users who visited a total of 113,880 pages. There was an increase of 3% in the number of users compared to 2018.



■ 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.

In 2019 the portal held 5,353 reports, which was an increase of 12% compared to 2018, and received 4,375 visits by 2,750 users who visited a total of 25,435 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. The results and findings of the survey of master's graduate employment outcomes were also integrated into the platform during 2019.

The EUC Dades portal received 6,340 visits during the year by 4,160 users who visited a total of 34,860 pages.

In 2019, AQU Catalunya started a project to redesign the EUC portal on the basis of a new conception and design, with the purpose of integrating the EUC Estudis, EUC Dades, EUC Informes and WINDDAT websites into one single web portal.

Round table-workshops and other events

AQU Catalunya organises round table-workshops and events that are aimed mainly at the higher education community and government authorities in Catalonia. These events provide opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and know-how and serve to enhance and underpin the quality culture and continuous enhancement throughout the higher education system in Catalonia.

During 2019, five events were organised as part of the cycle of round table-workshops in which the results and findings of the **Employers project** were presented, and two were organised on **training for students** who either participate or wish to participate in quality assurance procedures at AQU Catalunya.

The purpose of the Employers project round table-workshops is to inform HEIs of the ways in which the labour market (employers) perceives the education and training of graduates in each sector and to intensify the synergies between

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these two worlds and enhance the quality of programmes of study. They also provide a platform for consultation and discussion between the different agents responsible for the training of professionals in each area and serve as the starting point for enhancement proposals:

- **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Communication**

Held at the Auditorium at the Ramon Llull University's Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Barcelona on 30 January 2019

A summary of the event and the workshop conclusions are available in: [Conclusions and enhancement proposals from the round table/workshop on "Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Communication".](#)

139 people signed up for the event.

- **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Tourism**

Held at the University of Girona's Faculty of Tourism on 27 February, 2019.

A summary of the event and the workshop conclusions are available in: [Conclusions and enhancement proposals from the round table/workshop on "Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Tourism".](#)

78 people signed up for the event.

- **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Economics and Business Management**

Held at the University of Barcelona's Faculty of Economics and Business Studies (Aula Magna) on 17 May 2019

A summary of the event and the workshop conclusions are available in: [Conclusions and enhancement proposals from the round table/workshop on "Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Economics and Business Management".](#)

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132 people signed up for the event.

■ **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Humanities**

Held at the University of Barcelona's Faculty of Geography and History (Aula Magna) on 19 June 2019

A summary of the event and the workshop conclusions are available in: [Conclusions and enhancement proposals from the round table/workshop on “Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Humanities”.](#)

118 people signed up for the event.

■ **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Biosciences**

Held at the Autonomous University of Barcelona/UAB's Faculty of Biosciences, Cerdanyola del Vallès, on 8 November 2019

A summary of the event and the workshop conclusions are available in: [Conclusions and enhancement proposals from the round table/workshop on “Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century – the future for higher education in Biosciences”.](#)

100 people signed up for the event.

Publications

AQU Catalunya published a range of twenty original publications including the reports of findings of the graduate outcomes survey as seen from the perspective of employers; the new Code of Ethics; the Strategic Plan for 2019-2022; the Catalan Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (CHE-QF/MCQES); the AQU Catalunya Glossary for teaching staff assessment; a report on the success profiles of tenure-eligible lecturers (2013-2017); in addition to the revision of the validation, monitoring and accreditation methodologies for first/bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, the Guide to IQAs certification and the Guide to university research assessment at department level. The 2018 Annual Report was also published.

4.2. Communication tools

AQU website

AQU Catalunya's corporate website is the primary channel used by the Agency to communicate its activities. All contents were kept up to date throughout the year to ensure that information reaching target audiences was of quality and met rigorous standards.

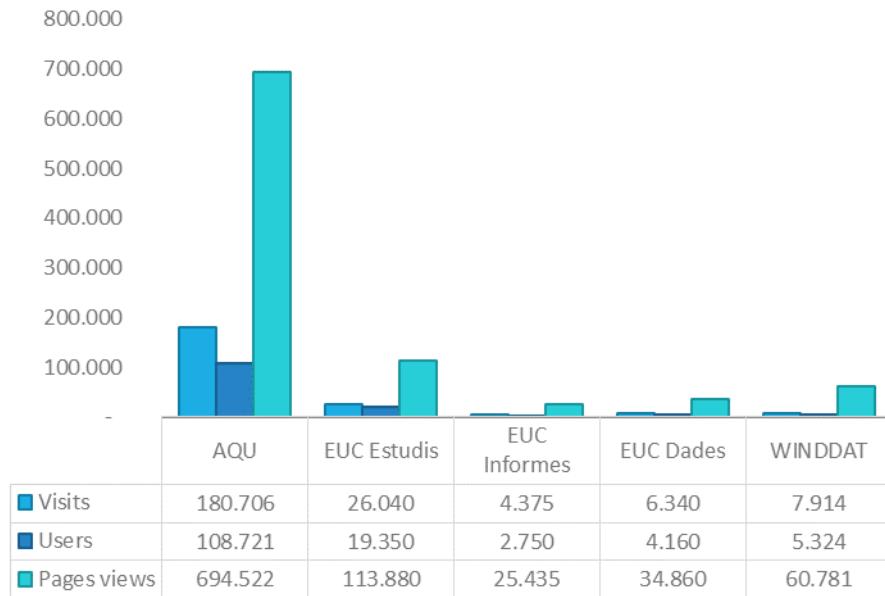
Work also began in 2019 on renewing the website with a functional analysis of the current website and definition of the technical, functional and maintenance requirements of a new version of the website, the contract for which was also awarded.

Continued impetus was given to the design of infographics to quickly and clearly present information on projects carried out by the Agency and their outcomes, and the information on the main browser menus was reorganised to simplify and make use of the website and information searches easier.

The approximate number of visits to the corporate website and other sites that depend on it, together with the number of users and page views, were as follows:

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Graph 3. Number of visits, users and page views to AQU Catalunya websites (2019)



Online newsletter (*elButlletí*)

The four issues for the year (numbers 92 to 95) of AQU's e-newsletter (*elButlletí*) were published and sent to 11,300 subscribers, which was an increase of 24% over the previous year's number of subscriptions.

Twitter

By the end of 2019 the AQU Catalunya Twitter account had 1,850 followers, which represented an 18% increase in the total number compared to 2018, and 294 tweets had been sent. In addition, there were 513 mentions of @a qucatalunya and approximately 8,000 profile visits.

YouTube

During 2019 thirty-three (33) papers and presentations from round tables, workshops and other events organised by AQU Catalunya to present the findings of the Employers project were published on AQU's YouTube channel. The videos were also disseminated via Twitter, the outcome of which was positive, with threads reaching up to 60% in several cases.

There were 3,242 views (with an accumulation of 12,089 views) throughout the year. The video with the highest number of views (273) was the institutional presentation of the Agency in English, followed by the VSMA Framework in Catalan (233).

Media outlets

Eight citations from AQU Catalunya appeared in print media during 2019 (see annex 4).

The director of AQU, Martí Casadesús, was also interviewed on TVE's *Informatiu 2* news programme on 11 November.

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.



COMMITMENT TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

These strategic priorities will be implemented through specific action steps throughout the period covered by the Plan.

Code of Ethics

A new [Code of Ethics for AQU Catalunya](#), which inherited the principles and values of the Agency's first code of ethics (2008), was endorsed in 2019. The fundamental principles underlying the new Code are simplicity, inspiration, guidance and continuous improvement and enhancement.

There are two main sections that are the cornerstone of the new Code: one that sets out the fundamental and instrumental values that apply to action by the Agency and another with the commitments inherent to this. A third section sets out the enforcement mechanisms.

Quality assurance according to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

In order for the decisions of quality assurance agencies in Europe to be recognised by all other countries in Europe, QA agencies are required to undergo an external review once every five years to ensure their quality assurance procedures comply with the [*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*](#) (2015).

In response to the enhancement recommendations made following the review of AQU Catalunya by ENQA in 2017, a progress report on the Agency's Action Plan for 2019-2022 was drawn up in 2019 and sent to ENQA for its information.

5.2. Governing, QA and advisory bodies

Governing and quality assurance bodies

AQU Catalunya reaches its agreements through its corresponding governing and quality assurance bodies. One important agreement by these in 2019 was the reappointment of Lluís Torner Sabata as chair of the Research Assessment Commission (CAR). The Agency also took into account the opinions of various advisory bodies, including the Advisory Committee, the Committee of Vice-rectors responsible for academic governance and quality, the University QA Units Committee, the Technical Committee for Surveys and the Student Advisory Committee.

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In relation to the Appeals Committee, a total number of 191 appeals concerning the assessment and accreditation of teaching staff were filed in 2019. This was an increase of 18% in the number of appeals, which was due to the increase in the number of applications for staff assessment and accreditation compared to the previous year.

In addition, the Committee settled all of the appeals made by teaching staff in relation to applications in 2018. Out of a total of 108 appeals pending, 20 were upheld and 88 rejected.

With regard to the submission of supporting arguments following **reviews for programme accreditation**, three submissions were made in 2019. One decision was issued to reject an appeal made against an "accreditation" outcome for a PhD programme, and two favourable reports were issued against a previous negative validation decision by the Spanish Council of Universities (*Consejo de Universidades*), which thereby ratified favourable decisions by the corresponding AQU Catalunya specific committee.

5.3. External experts

External experts play an integral role in AQU Catalunya's quality assurance procedures. In 2019 the database of reviewers received 250 new curriculums and the pool of experts currently consists of 1,944 people (60% academics, 20% professionals and 20% students). In 2019 418 experts took part in institutional and programme review procedures and 311 in teaching staff assessment procedures.

Diagram 1. Experts according to gender (2019)



The Agency ensures that all experts are adequately trained prior to taking part in its QA procedures. In the case of students, two courses were organised in 2019, one on the handbooks used in the assessment of teaching staff and another more generic course on institutional quality assurance.

6. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

AQU Catalunya provided accountability and was transparent with the actions it carried out in 2019, a year in which the Agency was involved in intense legal activities. The system for quality and information security management was also maintained active.

The Agency also leveraged ICT (information and communications technologies) to underpin its operational and technological capabilities and advancement.

With regard to economic management, the Agency was given a clean outcome for the economic audit of 2018 and the Public Audit Office for Catalonia issued the Agency's annual audit report for 2017, according to which the opinion of the Public Audit Office was that “the annual accounts offer, in all of the significant aspects, a true and fair view of the net worth and financial situation of AQU Catalunya on 31 December 2017”.

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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
- with the universities and other higher education institutions in Catalonia, dealing with matters as requested.

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

- with the Department of Education, in the quality assurance of Arts higher education programmes (performing and visual arts);
- with the Professional Training Council of Catalonia (*Consell Català de Formació Professional*), to take part in the Internal Planning and Forward Studies working group;
- with the Department of the Presidency's Directorate General for Analytical and Forward Studies, in the development of three forward planning round table-workshops (industry, services, and leisure and tourism);
- with the Directorate General of Public Administration, in the cataloguing of university degrees that may be subject to public calls;

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- with the Department of Health in the Professional Dialogue Forum (FDP), to align planning and professional management policies;
- 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.

It also engaged with social agents to give impetus to the Employers project, and with Barcelona City Hall (Ajuntament) to provide support for the informative sessions that they organised.

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 2019 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 2019 were as follows:

INQAAHE

AQU Catalunya hosted the Secretariat of the [International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education](#) (INQAAHE) for the sixth 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 2019](#), 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.

In 2019 AQU Catalunya participated in one of the **review subcommittees**.



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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.

■ 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.

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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.

■ TeSLA (**closed, 2016-2019**)

[An Adaptive Trust-based e-assessment System for Learning](#)

As part of the European framework programme Horizon 2020, the European Commission endorsed the TeSLA innovation and research project (Adaptive Trust-based e-assessment System for Learning), the objective of which was to define and develop a system that facilitates online examination in such a way that guarantees authentication and authorship at different points in the learning process. In addition to educational aspects (teaching and learning), the project addresses related ethical, technological and legal aspects, in particular data protection. The system is also adapted for students with special education needs



AQU Catalunya led the package dealing with the quality assurance of online study programmes in which ENQA and EQANIE also participated, the main objective of the package being the quality assurance of e-assessment processes.

During 2019, AQU Catalunya helped to organise the 2nd TeSLA International Event, which took place at the Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau (Barcelona) on 15 February, where an e-assessment workshop was held. The Agency was also given a clean technical and financial audit for the project.

■ LIREQA (**closed, 2016-2019**)

[Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance](#)

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The LIREQA project (Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance) came to an end in 2019 with the final conference held on 22 May 2019 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The project was funded by the European Erasmus+ programme (*Key action 3: Support for Policy Reform*) and was coordinated by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

The focus of the LIREQA project was on ways in which fair and effective academic recognition practices can be supported through internal and external quality assurance, with various different stakeholders contributing information on their points of view and situation. These included interest groups, students, higher education institutions, QA agencies, ENIC-NARIC centres, governments and officials representing the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

AQU Catalunya participated in the conference in which a series of recommendations were presented to encourage academic recognition, aimed at the previously mentioned agents. These recommendations are set out in the document [Integrating academic recognition and quality assurance: practical recommendations](#).

■ DEQAR (closed, 2017-2019)

[Database of External Quality Assurance Reports](#)

DEQAR was one of the projects selected for EU co-funding under Erasmus+ in which AQU Catalunya participated, together with sixteen other QA agencies and other agents including ENQA and EURASHE.

Led by EQAR, the main aim of the DEQAR project was the development of a database that would enhance access to reports and decisions on higher education institutions and programmes externally reviewed against the ESG.

During 2019, AQU Catalunya uploaded the validation reports (programme specifications) and modification reports to the EQAR database and presented the [project's QA results search engine](#).

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590216-EPP-1-2017-1-BE-EPPKA3-PI-FORWARD

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Follow-up to the international QA review of the Faculty of Law at the Universidad de San Martín de Porres (Lima, Peru)

In 2016 the Agency undertook an external QA review of the Faculty of Law at the Universidad de San Martín de Porres (Peru), which led to its quality accreditation. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) lay down that institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

In this context, although accreditation is valid until 2022, in July 2019 the specific commission responsible for the initial review procedure monitored improvements and enhancements implemented between 2016 and 2018.

Exchange

AQU Catalunya actively participated in events, forums and projects that contribute added value to Catalan universities and the system of higher education in Catalonia and which publicise and disseminate the Agency's activities at international level and enable it to keep abreast with the latest developments in quality assurance.

In 2019, it delivered 16 presentations and papers at international meetings (see annex 2). Four of these dealt with the quality assurance of e-learning, a legacy of the TeSLA project. Two papers were also delivered during the year to the European Quality Assurance Forum (Berlin) on "[Engendering quality assurance processes: A matter of \(e\)quality](#)" and "[The assessment of the social dimension of Higher Education](#)".

In 2019 a staff member of AQU Catalunya was on placement at the Institutional Evaluation Programme agency in Geneva to understand more about the system of institutional evaluation that the IEP undertakes.

COMMITMENT TO SAFE AND ETHICAL WORKING CONDITIONS

10. INTERNAL ORGANISATION

10.1. Human resources

In 2019 a new training plan was introduced, the aim of which is to bring staff training in line with the Agency's human resources strategy and tailor internal HR policies in line with the new ISO 9001 standard and ENQA's Competencies Framework.

A study was also carried out to define the introduction of teleworking at the Agency, together with implementation of a clocking-in system.

In 2019 a protocol for the Agency was also designed for the prevention and for dealing with sexual and gender-based harassment at AQU Catalunya, which is in the process of being revised.

Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya

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