



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

A REVIEW PROCESS IN MEXICO USING EUROPEAN METHODS AND STANDARDS

**Report by AQU on the international accreditation process of
university degree programmes at the *Centro Universitario de la
Costa Sur (Universidad de Guadalajara)***

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FOREWORD

This report gives the outcomes of and reflections on the review process carried out in March 2008 for the accreditation of six university degree programmes given at the *Centro Universitario de la Costa Sur* (CUCSUR), in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The application of the evaluation methodology used by AQU (a recognised European QA agency), together with the use of the European standards for quality assurance stemming from the Bologna Process, represents a unique experience and a new development and also offers new ways to open up cooperation between the university systems in Latin America and Europe.

International accreditation processes emerging at the present time are based on the growing competitiveness in the higher education market and the need to disseminate, with a more or less commercial emphasis, satisfactory results. The project presented here, however, presents a series of alternative values associated with the public dimension of education. The fact that the institution is state-run and the QA agency is also a public body provides a complementary view of these international quality assurance processes and it is postulated that review and international accreditation can serve as the driving force for innovation and collaboration between different university systems.

The project offers practices and elements for the discussion and development of international accreditation methods and processes in the public sector, and opens up an interesting path for exploration on both sides of the Atlantic over the next few years.

Javier Bará Temes

Director of AQU Catalunya

PROLOGUE

AQU is an independent public QA agency that was founded in 1996. Recognised at the European level by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), its main mission is to carry out external reviews of the university system in Catalonia (Spain) in order to:

- a) inform society about the levels of quality in Catalan universities,
- b) safeguard the public interest in relation to the levels of educational quality, and
- c) promote the enhancement of services offered by the universities.

The methods implemented by AQU are based on evaluation, certification and accreditation.

Although the main activities of AQU are concentrated in Catalonia, the Agency is also active on an international scale in leading new developments in quality assurance methodologies in the field of higher education.

The review process established for the *Centro Universitario de la Costa Sur* (CUCSUR) has been tested, in its current format, on approximately a hundred recognised degree programmes offered at public and private universities in Catalonia and, as a generic evaluation concept, on more than three hundred recognised degree programmes.

The application of this methodology in Mexico involved its adaptation to enable both the terminology and the structure of various indicators to be adapted to the local situation, although no change was necessary in the structure of the protocol. It is interesting to point out that, in the adaptation stage, the goal was set to minimise the changes to the methodology, and this called for intense work of an analytical nature by the CUCSUR in order to make this possible.

In relation to the methodology used by AQU, it is important to underline the fact that contextual benchmarks are necessary for its application and the making of objective judgments. In the case of the CUCSUR, AQU agreed to work with the benchmarks of the *Universidad de Jalisco* network of campuses, which forms part of the *Universidad de Guadalajara*.

This report by AQU describes the aims of the project, the methodology used, the organisation of the self-evaluation and external review processes, the results of the project and the priorities for

improvement that must serve to define plans and measures to enhance the degree programmes assessed, together with the conclusions and recommendations to be born in mind for projects in the future.

Josep Grifoll Saurí

Director of Technical Services/Quality Assurance, AQU Catalunya

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalisation process being experienced by the world's societies since the turn of the century also affects the higher education sector. Internationalisation leads to new forms of mobility by teachers, students and graduates, and a new redistribution of resources. There has been an increase in competitiveness, and higher education, in the sense of a public asset that is protected by national governments, has begun to incorporate elements that are typical of private assets. Illustrations of this trend are the efforts by universities to attract talented students, in competition with other universities, and the mobility of university graduates in search of better labour markets in the international panorama.

This logically leads to a growing demand for measures to reinforce the position of university institutions in an increasingly competitive context, both nationally and internationally. International review and/or accreditation is regarded as one of the services with the highest growth expectations over the next few years. This is supported by policies that give impetus to greater university autonomy, which enables universities to seek additional recognition to that laid down by national authorities.

The *Centro Universitario de la Costa Sur* (CUCSUR) is the first institution in the *Universidad de Jalisco* network of campuses (*Universidad de Guadalajara*) to initiate a review process by a European QA agency (AQU) with a view to the international accreditation of six degree programmes. Contact was made between AQU and the CUCSUR in October 2006, and the actual process began on 18 September 2007 with the signing of an agreement between AQU and the Mexican institution. Pursuant to the provisions of the agreement, a four-stage review process was set in motion:

1. Analysis of the AQU methodology guidelines and their adaptation to the specific circumstances of the CUCSUR.
2. Preparation of the self-evaluation reports by the self-evaluation committees and their validation by the university community, and referral to AQU in February 2008.
3. A site visit by the external reviewers and preparation of the external review reports. The visit took place in March 2008, and the external review reports were received in April 2008.
4. Preparation of the enhancement proposals and negotiation of the final terms.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION

With regard to university quality, accreditation and assessment (either *ex ante* or *ex post*) is a hallmark that, from the state's point of view, implies that certain minimum standards are complied with by all stakeholders involved in the giving of officially recognised degree programmes. State-recognised degree programmes could be included, for example, in treaties with other countries for the purpose of obtaining international equivalents for degree qualifications. One must bear in mind that the sphere of education, on all levels, is national, with the planning of programme accreditation being established by the state itself.

The integration of certain economies has indeed triggered intense debate on the international dimension of degree programmes, especially higher degrees. The Bologna Process in Europe for the development of a common area for higher education in Europe is one clear example of this growing internationalisation in the sector and, even though accreditation continues to be managed and organised at the state level, in Europe it is already necessary for accreditation to be carried out according to specific methodological standards.

Parallel to state planning, private initiative has developed an alternative concept of quality assurance according to which priority is given not to its universal application to all universities, but to the search for the differentiation of institutions in a competitive market. This approach is illustrated by the so-called seals of quality.

If the State grants some kind of legal guarantee to accreditation that private initiative does not, the panorama changes in international practice, which, because it being less regulated, gives more room for private agents that specialise in quality assurance.

At the same time, one must be aware of the existence of various dangers in the introduction of international quality assurance systems. Firstly, the cost factor stemming mainly from the hiring of international experts. Together with this is also the risk associated with the conflict of interest that may appear among those in charge of such international accreditation processes. In a market that is not very transparent, an operator (QA agency) that is coherent in awarding accreditation could thereby be seriously affected by the competitiveness of other agents that use less trustworthy practices. At all events, the main point slowing down the development of international accreditation is the very limited degree to which international standards recognised by the university community for use on a worldwide scale have been identified.

Given the difference between the spheres of public and private activity in accreditation, the question then arises of the general meaning of international accreditation, and in particular of the case of the CUCSUR.

Firstly: What does the international accreditation of a degree programme or institution actually mean? This is not an easy question to answer when there is no overall agreement that sets the standards for international accreditation. One would need to point out that international accreditation involves an institution in country A (in this case the CUCSUR) being reviewed according to the standards of another country (those applied by AQU for degrees reviewed in Spain). This form of accreditation provides unquestionable benefits, although it does not exactly conform to what a real international accreditation should be, given its bilateral or two-sided nature. It may also harbour certain problems involving the dovetailing of the officially recognised structures of the programmes in the two countries; moreover, in extreme cases, it could even be a transmitter of certain defects between systems.

Does international quality mean that graduates of such courses qualify for international mobility or, on the other hand, is it a symbol of a particular quality that successfully attracts talent interested in the offer of specialised academic programmes that are different and in a particular place? Any international accreditation standards will need to deal with these and other questions.

3. AIMS OF THE CUCSUR INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION PROJECT

The CUCSUR is located in Autlán de la Grana, a small city with a population of 60,000 inhabitants that is the main urban centre in the region of the Costa Sur in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. The institution forms part of the network of campuses (*Red de Campus Territoriales*) of the *Universidad de Guadalajara*, which is the second largest state-run university in Mexico according to the number of students and teachers.

Although the services provided by the CUCSUR bear the important hallmark of the *Universidad de Guadalajara*, it is interesting to point out that the institution itself has an outstanding reputation in the Costa Sur, both for the quality of its staff (teachers and administration and services staff) and its strategic value in the training of new professionals that provide added value to business and industry in the region, which has a coastline of outstanding potential for tourism and an inland region with agriculture, forestry and food industry developments.

The CUCSUR thus plays a significant role in the dissemination of knowledge among the general population, which takes place through various practices, including radio programmes with a cultural content. As a result of its staff, resources and facilities, the CUCSUR, in short, represents a highly important spearhead for the region's socio-economic standing.

From 2004 onwards, the CUCSUR established a clear institutional commitment to quality in the degree programmes it offers and the diversification of its educational services. As a result of this, at the beginning of 2008 all (100%) of its assessable programmes of study were accredited at the national level by QA agencies recognised by the *Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior* (COPAES).¹ Faced with the challenge of training human resources for the globalised labour market, however, the CUCSUR set itself the goal in 2008 of setting in motion a review process by a European QA agency. The main aim of this institutional policy is:

“To achieve international performance standards and offer degree programmes that are of recognised world quality.”

The international accreditation process was applied to the institution's degree programmes in Tourism, Administration, Accountancy, Law, Telecomputing Engineering and Civil Engineering Works and General Services.

¹ Council for Higher Education Accreditation

GENERAL INDICATORS OF THE CUCSUR DEGREE PROGRAMMES REVIEWED BY AQU

STUDENT REGISTRATION NUMBERS

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Degree in Administration	325	309	322	350	334	342	342
Degree in Public Accountancy	319	334	329	347	341	349	335
Degree in Law	373	381	369	394	377	384	349
Degree in Tourism	308	276	297	273	248	251	252
Degree in Civil Engineering Works and General Services	257	221	217	224	211	236	203
Degree in Telecomputing Engineering	98	134	181	167	186	187	173

GRADUATION RATE, according to degree programme and cohort

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Degree in Administration	48%	52%	19%	50%	40%	48%
Degree in Public Accountancy	49%	36%	50%	50%	40%	35%
Degree in Law	50%	47%	50%	45%	48%	35%
Degree in Tourism	25%	14%	13%	20%	40%	25%
Degree in Civil Engineering Works and General Services	39%	10%	10%	15%	51%	19%
Degree in Telecomputing Engineering	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	26%

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Administration

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	7	9	8	8	8	9	6
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total no. teachers with a Master's	6	8	7	7	8	9	6
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Total part-time teachers	24	23	23	19	23	18	18

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Public Accountancy

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	4	4	4	4	5	6	7
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total no. teachers with a Master's	4	4	4	4	5	6	7
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total part-time teachers	22	21	21	15	18	14	14

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Law

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	4	4	5	6	6	5	4
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	0	0	3	3	3	3
Total no. teachers with a Master's	4	4	4	3	3	2	1
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total part-time teachers	28	32	32	24	29	23	23

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Tourism

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	6	5	7	6	8	6	7
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total no. teachers with a Master's	4	5	6	5	7	6	6
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	2	0	1	1	1	0	1
Total part-time teachers	18	18	18	19	16	16	16

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Civil Engineering Works and General Services

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	5	6	8	8	8	10	8
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total no. teachers with a Master's	3	5	3	4	7	9	7
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	2	0	4	4	1	1	1
Total part-time teachers	31	26	26	26	12	18	18

TEACHING STAFF ON THE DEGREES REVIEWED. Degree in Telecomputing Engineering

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total no. full-time teachers	3	3	3	3	4	4	6
Total no. teachers with a doctorate	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
Total no. teachers with a Master's	0	0	2	2	3	3	3
Total no. teachers with an u/grad. degree	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total part-time teachers	4	8	8	7	12	6	6

DEGREES OFFERED AT THE CUCSUR
B.Sc. (equiv.) in Telecomputer Engineering
B.Sc. (equiv.) in Automotive Mechanics
Degree in Administration
Degree in Public Accountancy
Degree in Law
Degree in Tourism
Degree in Engineering (Natural Resources and Agriculture)
Degree in Civil Engineering Works and General Services
Degree in Telecomputing Engineering
Degree in Agronomy
Mechatronics
International Processes and Commerce
Degree in Marine Biology
Degree in Nutrition
Master's degree in Technological Development Engineering
Master's degree in Regional Administration and Management
Master's degree in Natural Resource Management
Master's degree in Ecological Sciences and Integrated Ocean and Coastal Management
Doctorate in Biosystematics, Ecology and Natural Resource Management

Criteria for these degree programmes being selected by the CUCSUR

On the basis of the goal to review its performance according to international standards and offer appropriate degree programmes in the global market, six degree programmes were chosen for the review process by the European QA agency (AQU). All of these programmes had previously been reviewed and accredited in Mexico by both the *Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior* (CIEES) and Mexican QA agencies endorsed by the *Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior* (COPAES). This means that, on the one hand, these six degree programmes had already satisfactorily achieved the quality standard for university programmes in Mexico; on the other, the communities of teachers, students and management staff involved had already accumulated the experience of two review processes

carried out by external bodies and had incorporated a culture of performance review that enabled them to participate in an appropriate way in the exercise with the Catalan QA agency.

Criteria for selecting AQU for this project

After analysing various outlines of types of quality review, mainly American and European, the CUCSUR decided on the comprehensive model of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for the assessment of its degree programmes according to international standards. The institution contacted AQU as a QA agency endorsed by European standards (recently included in the European Quality Assurance Register, EQAR); it is also a public entity, like the *Universidad de Guadalajara*, and it has extensive experience in the review of university degree programmes in Catalonia, as well as dealing with international reviews in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It has also shown itself to be capable of embracing new challenges and of adapting to the context of a Mexican university by accepting the challenge to undertake the review proposed by the CUCSUR in a Latin American context, which will make an important contribution to progress being made in international accreditation models for higher education programmes.

4. THE REVIEW APPROACH OF AQU TO INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION AT THE CUCSUR

Bearing in mind the abovementioned context, the intention of AQU was to review the degree programmes at the CUCSUR for the purpose of accreditation, although the Agency also considered the project to be an opportunity to make progress in the development of new methods for international accreditation.

In what particular way could AQU contribute to this international accreditation project? Firstly, it is a public QA agency with experience in the external quality assurance of university programmes and, within the regulatory framework of Spain and Catalonia, is authorised to accredit university degree programmes. It also stands out as being one of the European agencies that more actively participates in international review projects for the purpose of developing methodologies for this type of practice. One clear example is the two TEEP Trans-European evaluation projects that were funded by the European Commission and implemented for the assessment of new Bachelor and Master's degrees.

From the Mexican point of view, AQU is viewed as a foreign QA agency that is recognised within the European framework of quality assurance. Its standing is based on an external review of its quality based on its legal status, independency, course of development and the use of a methodology that gives it full member status of ENQA and inclusion on the EQAR register.

The absence of any worldwide quality standards led AQU to adopt the aforementioned two-sided criterion, for which degree programmes accredited by the Agency outside of Catalonia would require a minimum level of quality equivalent to that of programmes offered by faculties and colleges in Catalan universities. The bilateral or two-sided nature of such a review would, in any case, be reduced through the use of the European standards (ESG), which are of a much more comprehensive nature.

This approach represented a highly important determining factor in the path towards the international accreditation of degree programmes at the CUCSUR, especially due to the European context characterised by the Bologna Process, which lays down that new recognised degree programmes in Spain (and Catalonia) must be structured according to EHEA standards.

One essential element in this new degree programme framework lies in the designing of programmes that define learning outcomes and European ECTS credits for graduates. AQU

corroborated the need for this aspect, which serves as inspiration for the EHEA, to be taken into account in the CUCSUR review.

It likewise considered it necessary to review the key elements of the system's capacity to offer these programmes with the guarantee of quality, namely resources and an internal quality assurance system.

Once this situation was in place, AQU was able to proceed with:

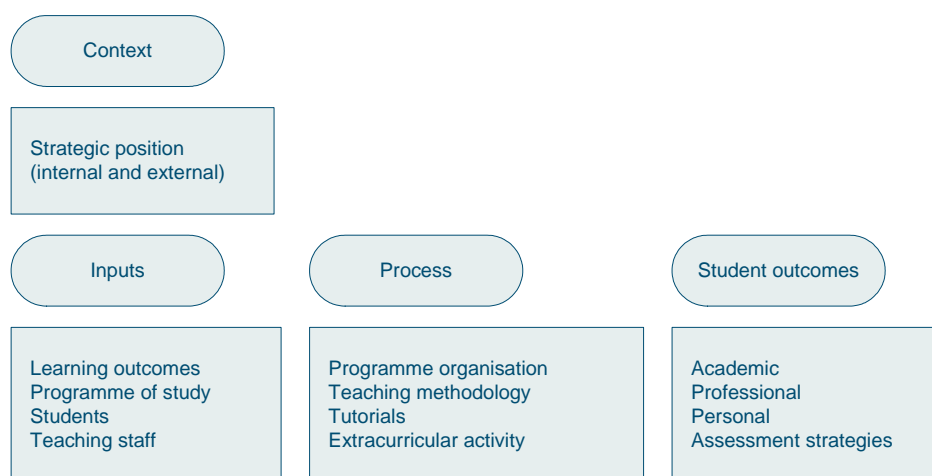
- An *ex ante* programme assessment based on the relevance of the programmes' learning outcomes and the design for their implementation, which, in the strict sense of the word, is not an accreditation.
- An *ex post* accreditation to confirm that the outcomes were valid and achieved through the appropriate implementation of resources and teaching strategies.

The situation of the programmes at the CUCSUR did not initially allow for the application of either strategy (assessment or accreditation), due to the fact that degrees at the CUCSUR were in the stage of adaptation to a competence-based teaching and learning model.

The use of an alternative accreditation system just for the CUCSUR was, from a strategic point of view, highly complicated, due mainly to the fact that it would be difficult for the university system in Catalonia and Spain to accept the outcome without there being a pre-defined framework recognised by the university system for this purpose.

Given this panorama, AQU decided to apply a thorough enhancement-based diagnosis to the CUCSUR degree programmes, which is used extensively to assess degree programmes given at Catalan universities. This system would provide a precise snapshot of the level of quality of the CUCSUR programmes and establish the basis for appropriate adaptation to the model defined according to learning outcomes.

The AQU methodology was organised into four main analytical areas: context, inputs, process and student outcomes.



In addition to these four areas, which were covered by the review panels, there were also an extensive series of indicators grouped into tables.

Table of indicators associated with the review methodology
General data on the institution (teaching aspects)
General data on the institution (other dimensions)
Demand and level of new student admissions
Registration indicators
Indicators on the curriculum
Teaching methodologies
Programme of study
Academic outcomes
Group size, academic performance and graduation
Analysis of student cohorts
Teaching staff: type and staff number
Room and space facilities in the institution
Room and space facilities for the degree
Library characteristics
Graduate employment rate
Quality of labour market outcomes
Suitability of study for graduate employment/labour market outcomes

The thoroughness of the evaluation protocol provides the necessary elements to establish the quality of the degree programme being assessed to a sufficiently precise level and from many different perspectives, as well as offering the necessary elements for enhancement purposes.

Once the decision to use the enhancement-based diagnosis methodology had been made, AQU resolved that, as a minimum necessary condition in order for the international accreditation process to start, degree programmes being examined should be recognised by the corresponding Mexican QA authorities.

ADAPTATION OF THE AQU METHODOLOGY TO THE CASE OF CUCSUR

Once the workgroups were formed for each of the six degree programmes to be assessed, which would later become the self-evaluation committees, a work session was held with two European QA experts to analyse European review policies and strategies used both by ENQA in Europe and those of AQU.

A detailed analysis of the methodology guidebook provided by AQU was then jointly carried out by the CUCSUR's Coordinating Committee and the six self-evaluation committees, in order to understand its characteristics and identify any problems regarding conceptualisation, terminology and language. It is worthy of mention here that the self-evaluation committees had

already had prior experience with reviews carried out by four different accreditation bodies recognised by COPAES, and an interesting exercise of comparative analysis was undertaken of the four quite different methodologies, together with the one being proposed by AQU. As a result of this work, a definition for the common criteria, variables and indicators for quality was established by consensus among the communities of the six degrees to be reviewed, resulting in a design to adapt the AQU methodology guidebook to the context of the network of campuses in the *Universidad de Jalisco* and the specific characteristics of the CUCSUR and its experience in national review processes. This is one particularly interesting element that has stemmed from the analysis of both European and Latin American methodologies.

The adaptation of the methodology guidebook to the CUCSUR and the self-evaluation formats were negotiated with AQU, and the final agreed version was used for the self-evaluation of the six degrees by the self-evaluation committees, under the supervision of the CUCSUR Coordinating Committee.

It should be mentioned that constant communication and the willingness to reach agreements between the CUCSUR community and AQU were key elements in actually getting the review process up and going.

5. ORGANISATION OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS

AQU organised the external review process on the basis of three suppositions. The first was that there was an external review team made up of experienced and competent academics. This external review team also included recent graduates from the various degrees being analysed. The second criterion was that of combining the international and Mexican viewpoints, with QA experts from Catalonia (Spain) and other Mexican universities.

Parallel to this, AQU also sought to reduce the cost of the visit on the assumptions that it would not benefit financially from the process and that the organisation would be carried out effectively and efficiently.

A review team made up of four members was formed for each degree programme: a chairperson (teachers of renown from a Catalan university with experience in academic administration at the vice-rector level, head of faculty/department/college); one academic member from another Mexican university, linked to an accreditation body recognised by the COPAES; one graduate from the CUCSUR from the degree programme to be reviewed, and one QA expert also acting as representative for AQU.

The Mexican members were proposed by the CUCSUR and accepted by AQU following approval of their review experience and/or relevance, whereas the panel members from Catalonia were proposed by AQU and the CUCSUR informed of their selection.

Before travelling to Mexico, the panel chairpersons and members were provided with the necessary training. A session organised for the chairpersons included:

- Information on the CUCSUR, its organisation and academic context.
- Review methodology applied.
- Organisation of the site visit.
- Report structure (self-evaluation).
- Decision-making for accreditation.

AQU prepared a self-tuition package for the Mexican members of the team and provided an e-mail address where they could query any particular doubts regarding the process. This is probably one of the critical aspects that could be improved through the use of new communication technologies, especially video-conferences, which would give a great boost to this stage of training.

An expert was sent by the Agency to Mexico to act as trainer for the self-evaluation teams. This included a briefing on the organisation of the self-evaluation and external review process. Particular attention was paid to the aspects associated with the role of the committees and panels and their members in both processes and the method to prepare the evaluation reports.

The site visit to the institution was organised with both the different degrees and the interviews with the representative audiences in mind. The various external panels reviewing the six degrees interviewed more than two hundred people in the institution's academic community over the period of a week, including 59 teachers, 80 students, 15 members of administration staff, 51 graduates and 19 employers of graduates from the institution. This is a clear reflection of the organisational efforts that were necessary by the CUCSUR.

In order to economise on expenses, the proposal was made for the assessment of the degree programmes to be concentrated over a period of two weeks, as laid out in the table below.

Week 1: Accountancy, Administration, Tourism and Law				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday *	Friday
Coordinators - Accountancy degree	Coordinators - Administration degree	Coordinators - Tourism degree	CUCSUR supervisors	Coordinators - Law degree
Students - Accountancy	Students - Administration	Students - Tourism	Site visit to the facilities	Students - Law
Teaching staff - Accountancy	Teaching staff - Administration	Teaching staff - Tourism	Services staff	Teaching staff - Law
Graduates - Accountancy	Graduates - Administration	Graduates - Tourism	Administration staff	Graduates - Law
Preparation of reports	Preparation of reports	Preparation of reports	Preparation of report on degree programmes	Preparation of reports

* Joint visit by the review panels for Accountancy, Administration, Tourism and Law

Week 2: Civil Engineering and Telecomputing Engineering			
Monday	Tuesday		Wednesday
Coordinators – Civil Engineering degree	CUCSUR supervisors*		Coordinators – Telecomputing Engineering degree
Students - Civil Engineering	Site visit to the Telecomp. Eng. facilities	Site visit to the Civil Engineering facilities	Students - Telecomputing Engineering
Teaching staff - Civil Engineering	Administration staff	Administration staff	Teaching staff - Telecomputing Engineering
Graduates - Civil Engineering	Services staff	Services staff	Graduates - Telecomputing Engineering
Preparation of reports	Preparation of reports	Preparation of reports	Preparation of reports

* Joint/shared audience

AQU considered it to be necessary for the external review reports to deal with the strong and weak points, together with recommendations regarding the larger dimensions evaluated, and for the reports to not exceed 15 pages in content.

6. ORGANISATION OF THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

For the self-evaluation of its six degree programmes, the CUCSUR established an integral strategy that included the setting aside of a working space for the self-evaluation committees and constant communication between these and the Coordinating Committee. The work was carried out in a continuous fashion so that it did not affect the institution's daily activities.

The self-evaluation committees consisted of the degree coordinator, who chaired the committee, the head of the department most linked to the degree programme, both full and part-time teachers, and students, as set out in the AQU methodology guidebook. The Coordinating Committee was chaired by the campus rector, the academic secretary acted as the technical secretary, and the planning coordinator as operations coordinator. There was also a logistical support group.

Using the methodology guidebook agreed to with the Catalan QA agency, the self-evaluation committees gathered the necessary information to fill out the self-evaluation formats, and the Coordinating Committee brought together the statistical data. A work room (AQU room) was set up and logistical support and infrastructure provided for the self-evaluation committees to prepare their files and dossiers with evidence to back up the required outcomes and indicators.

During the process, opinion polls were carried out among students, teachers, graduates and employers for each degree to obtain their views on the way the programme was carried out and the criteria laid down in the methodology guidebook.

One important aspect of the work that was carried out during the self-evaluation was the constant interaction and cooperation between the self-evaluation committees and between these and the Coordinating Committee, in different plenary meetings that served to clear up any doubts, unify interpretations and reach consensus on the work. This was a decisive for achieving a basic homogeneity between the six self-evaluation reports, which were checked by the communities of each respective degree and subsequently referred to AQU in February 2008.

The self-evaluation reports dealt with each of the six main variables set out in the methodology guidebook: the self-evaluation process, the degree's strategic position, the system's capacity, the programme of study, programme delivery and the quality of the outcomes. In the final drawing up the self-evaluation reports, special emphasis was put on underlining the most significant strong and weak points for each variable and indicator analysed, in addition to the

self-evaluation committee's proposals for enhancement or change. This gave a broad and objective diagnosis of each degree programme, as well as input for the external review process.

7. REVIEW OUTCOMES FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES

The initial result of the evaluation was twelve reports, two for each degree (one self-evaluation and one external review).

The outcome of the process did not lead to international accreditation, the reasons for which are laid out below (underlined and numbered from 1 to 5). At all events, AQU is of the opinion that the process produced a more advanced outcome, in the sense that it placed the CUCSUR in an international context in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, and marked the start of a second stage devoted to the institution's improvement according to state-of-the-art international criteria, in addition to it having the guarantee that the process was carried out in accordance with the technical criteria for external review laid down by ENQA for this type of evaluation.

The main outcomes of the review of the six CUCSUR degree programmes by AQU are given below. They are publicly available on the CUCSUR website.

- With regard to the review process, the self-evaluation process was favourably assessed by AQU. The reports drawn up by the different committees were considered to be useful for enhancing the quality of the degree programmes. In general, the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement were identified in an appropriate way, and the work of the self-evaluation committees was serious and professional.
- As far as the strategic position of the degrees is concerned, the review by AQU confirmed the efforts and motivation of the CUCSUR academic community in favour of a quality-based educational model, although it is of the opinion that the close link with the local setting/environment could affect the institution's development in the future. However, overall action on behalf of the local community was also viewed positively.
- In relation to the system's capacity, the review detected a motivated body of students that is satisfied with their studies at the institution. It also showed that the teaching staff are committed and, in general, quite enthusiastic. The level of their academic qualifications is not up to international standards, especially in relation to the number of doctorate degree holders. (1) This was the first of the weaknesses identified for which AQU resolved to promote an Enhancement Plan in support of a subsequent accreditation.

The AQU review recognised the efforts made concerning the infrastructure necessary in order for the degree programmes to run, although it pointed out possible competence-based changes that will be necessary when the programmes of study are already running. It also

recommended possible enhancements for the development of more research-related activities.

At the same time that close links are maintained with the local environment, (2) it would be advisable at some point in the future to establish contacts and relations with national and international bodies and universities for teacher and student exchange. This aspect is considered to be highly important in international standards.

- The review observed that the institution had developed a quality management system and was carrying out actions to help disseminate the quality culture in all sectors of the academic community. All the same, it identified the advisability of careful consideration being given to the system in order to reinforce a positive impact on student learning and for it to be adapted to the requirements of competence-based degree programmes. This is recommended as an element to be developed in the Enhancement Plan.
- With regard to the programmes of study, the AQU review took into account that the degree programmes were going through a stage of revision, and that both old and new curricula were running at the same time. Along these lines, the Catalan agency established that the programmes reviewed had an overall competence profile that is adequate for the requirements of the local professional environment, and recommended that they be enhanced through new designs for competence-based curricula. (3) This was considered to be the third essential element for accreditation by AQU.
- In relation to programme delivery, the AQU review considered that the CUCSUR has implemented a life-wide learning model for students. An apparent tutorial programme orientated towards guidance regarding material received, student drop-out prevention in particular, and life-wide learning by students was detected.

It also verified that the institution is aware of the importance of academic innovation, and training courses on this aspect are provided for teachers.

On the other hand, it was detected that the placement/work experience system is not widespread. It was also observed that the institution is aware of the need for students and graduates to improve their English.

A final year project or dissertation to assess learning and the more holistic acquisition of competences is not set in the case of various degree programmes, which is a common factor in most university degrees at the international scale. (4) Methods to assess competence acquisition must be given particular consideration when the new programmes are adapted.

The review confirmed that the institution gives introductory courses for students from secondary education on the characteristics of the different degrees, although it revealed an absence in preparatory teaching (propaedeutics), which is highly necessary in the case of students from different places of origin and with different types of prior study.

- With regard to the quality of the academic outcomes, the AQU review revealed that a high percentage of students complete their studies within the anticipated period of time. The multi-faceted preparation of graduates is also highly valued in the local labour market.

Lastly, it was observed that the institution does not have a graduate monitoring policy for obtaining information that could be used for the continuous enhancement of the programmes of study. In the same way that there is the need to check that learning outcomes have been achieved through examinations that integrate understanding, (5) information on the professional development of graduates is essential for keeping the quality of learning updated.

On the basis of these outcomes, the CUCSUR started to discuss the introduction of an Enhancement Plan to give form to its commitment with the institution's academic community and with the other stakeholders, namely, families, employers and other university institutions.

8. MAIN PRIORITIES OF THE ENHANCEMENT PLAN

On the basis of the diagnosis carried out using the AQU methodology and the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG), the Catalan agency recommended a series of actions to CUCSUR in order for it to obtain approval for the quality of its degree programmes at the international level.

The following information was also called for in relation to the actions envisaged in the Enhancement Plan:

- The persons responsible for the carrying out of each action.
- Details of the main goals anticipated in each action.
- A timeline for the implementation and monitoring of the development of each action.

Actions recommended for the Enhancement Plan of degree programmes assessed in the CUCSUR:

- **Action 1:** Develop the institution's quality assurance system through the designing of a general plan for the monitoring and enhancement of the programmes assessed, which includes a significant role for the students.

(In line with European standard 1.1)

- **Action 2:** Complete the definition of the learning outcomes for the degrees assessed and the adaptation of the programmes with these goals in mind. NB: the learning outcomes must conform to the national criteria for quality, with renowned academic experts and professionals consulted for this purpose.

(In line with European standard 1.2)

- **Action 3:** Set up a system for the assessment of learning outcomes that includes a final year project/dissertation, based on theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, for the purposes of knowledge integration.

(In line with European standard 1.3)

- **Action 4:** Develop a system to appropriately increase the presence of teachers from the CUCSUR in national and international scientific networks.

(In line with European standard 1.4)

- **Action 5:** Establish a plan to enable 50% of all full-time teachers to have a doctorate degree.
(In line with European standard 1.4)
- **Action 6:** Consolidate a plan to foster the academic mobility of teachers and students at the CUCSUR.
(In line with European standard 1.5)
- **Action 7:** Improve the strategy for connecting university degrees with pre-university education.
(In line with European standard 1.5)
- **Action 8:** Improve the opportunities available to students to undertake professional work experience, introductory courses, etc.
(In line with European standard 1.5)
- **Action 9:** Improve the information systems in order to be able to consistently calculate indicators on the student profile, academic performance and the satisfaction of students, teachers and graduates.
(In line with European standard 1.6)
- **Action 10:** Make public information available on the Enhancement Plan established for the CUCSUR.
(In line with European standard 1.7)

Two supplementary actions are also included:

- Promote a CUCSUR association for graduates.
- Develop a job centre and the adequate monitoring of graduates.

9. CONCLUSIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY USED AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Is it possible to establish principles in order for further steps to be made in the international accreditation of quality and quality standards in one country applied to programmes in another? The answer to this question presupposes a clear idea of what the aims are of any international accreditation.

Private initiative can quite logically establish its own criteria, although the process of assessment at the CUCSUR suggests that it is possible to establish new dynamics and values in international accreditation.

Firstly, international accreditation must be considered as a tool that enhances international communication between university systems, especially those that require external recognition to consolidate their position in a more global context.

This new framework for international accreditation should include an approach that gives priority to the enhancement of the quality of the institution being assessed. International accreditation must obviously provide reliable information on academic levels, but it should also give clear proof of enhancements to quality achieved by university institutions. In other words, international accreditation must recognise the best institutions, but it should also disclose which institutions are most active in enhancing their quality.

International accreditation should be aimed at consolidating university quality and especially attentive to creating value in the region where a university institution is located. This means that indicators of quality in international accreditation should also take account of the local perspective.

If private international accreditation can lead to graduates of an institution gaining access as respectable professionals in a labour market elsewhere, the prospects stemming from the process at Autlán, without doing away with this same purpose, should also accentuate the importance of university institutions in their immediate proximity.

Moreover, the institution's position of offering a training that is both specialised and of sufficient quality should result in it attracting students and researchers from other areas, and even other countries.

Seen from this perspective, international accreditation can enhance the variety of academic approaches and give impetus to new knowledge being created in different institutions. It could be one way of escaping the risk of just being a copy in that value is given to the diversity of

teaching and learning methodologies, recognition given to the use of different languages and cultures for the diverse analysis of reality, and promotion given to new knowledge institutions that base their strength on geographical locations close to the objects of research; take, for example, degree programmes linked to the social sphere and the sector of the natural sciences.

As with any quality assurance system, an international accreditation system needs to be transparent. It must be transparent in its objectives and outcomes, in the methodology and the standards used, but it should also be transparent in terms of the administrative aspects (coordinators, participants, non-conflict of interests, etc.).

Considering that international accreditation presupposes certain methodological requirements which may increase the cost of its implementation, such as the presence of international reviewers on external review panels, the aspect of funding takes on a significant role. Irrespective of the thought that needs to be given to how international accreditation processes should be funded, however, the facts do indicate that this type of quality assurance could turn into a real quantum leap for the enhancement of institutions and university systems.

Finally, in addition to the need for a drive in funding for training in quality assurance systems to facilitate the implementation of efficient international accreditation methods that are both effective and less costly, the recommendation is made that any institution intending to seek international accreditation should also have an ambitious internal training strategy.

10. REFERENCES FOR THE PROJECT

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11. GLOSSARY

1. ANEI: Asociación Nacional de Instituciones en Educación Informática
2. AQU Catalunya: Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya
3. CACECA: Consejo de Acreditación de la Enseñanza en Contaduría y Administración
4. CACEI: Consejo de Acreditación de la Enseñanza de la Ingeniería
5. CONAET: Consejo Nacional para la Calidad de la Educación Turística
6. COPAES: Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior
7. CIEES: Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior
8. CUCSUR: Centro Universitario de la Costa Sur
9. ECTS: European Credit Transfer System
10. ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
11. EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register
12. ESG: European standards and guidelines for quality assurance
13. TEEP: Transnational European Evaluation Project

12. APPENDICES

Composition of the external review panels

External review panel –Administration

Chairperson	Josep Oliveras (Universitat Rovira i Virgili)
Academic reviewer	Arturo Sánchez Mondragón (CACECA)
Professional reviewer	Delia Ramos Zamora (Igraduate in Administration)
QA expert	Josep Grifoll (AQU Catalunya)

External review panel –Accountancy

Chairperson	Josep Oliveras (Universitat Rovira i Virgili)
Academic reviewer	Luis Ernesto Moreno Noriega (Universidad La Salle)
Professional reviewer	Sandra Pelayo Corona (graduate in Accountancy)
QA expert	Josep Grifoll (AQU Catalunya)

External review panel - Law

Chairperson	Álex Sáiz Arnáiz (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)
Academic reviewer	M. Estela Morales Tamez (Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León)
Professional reviewer	José Luis Guerrero Rosas (lawyer)
QA expert	Jaume Sarramona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

External review panel – Civil Engineering Works and General Services

Chairperson	Josep Ramon Casas (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya)
Academic reviewer	Mario Alberto Sesma Martínez (CACEI)
QA expert	Jaume Sarramona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

External review panel – Telecomputing Engineering

Chairperson	Lluís Jofre (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya)
Academic reviewer	Sergio Fuenlabrada Velásquez (ANEI)
Professional reviewer	César Ricardo Juárez Pelayo (graduate in Telecomp. Eng.)
QA expert	Jaume Sarramona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

External review panel - Tourism

Chairperson	Josep Oliveras (Universitat Rovira i Virgili)
Academic reviewer	Rafael Gutiérrez Niebla (CONAET)
Professional reviewer	Yéssica Limón Soltero (graduate in Tourism)
QA expert	Josep Grifoll (AQU Catalunya)

Self-evaluation committees in the CUCSUR

Self-evaluation committee - Administration

Héctor Gabriel García López (MA), degree coordinator
 Adán Michel Arechiga (MA), head of department
 César Amador Díaz Pelayo (MA), teacher
 Carlos Alberto Esparza González (MA), teacher
 María Elena López Hernández (MA), teacher
 Claudia Preciado Ortiz, student
 Erick Madrigal Guzmán, student
 Ana Paulina García Vergara, student
 Tanya Lizbeth Figueroa Cedano, student

Self-evaluation committee - Accountancy

Arturo Macedo Peña (MA), degree coordinator
 Luis Carlos Gámez Adame (MA), head of department
 Roberto Joya Arreola (MA), teacher
 Sara Macías Castellón (MA), teacher
 Gracia Patricia Michel Vázquez (MA), teacher
 Nitsa Glykeria Cobián Pizano (BA), assistant
 Jaime Sánchez Morán, student
 María Elena Michel García, student

Self-evaluation committee - Law

Bulmaro Tlacuahuac Sánchez (MA), degree coordinator
Dr. Laura Georgina Fong Gollaz, head of department
Dr. Araceli Ramírez Meda, teacher
Dr. Enrique Flores Terríquez, teacher
Baneza de Jesús Cueva Preciado, student
Tonatiuh Guzmán Quijada, student

Self-evaluation committee – Telecomputing Engineering

M. C. Karen Hernández Rueda (MSc), degree coordinator
Donato Vallin González (MSc), head of department
Ana Rosa Sahagún Castellanos (MA), teacher
Jorge Arturo Pelayo López (MA), teacher
Javier Claustro Bobadilla, student
Ernesto Alonso Coba Vázquez, student

Self-evaluation committee – Civil Engineering Works and General Services

Juan Ricardo Gutiérrez Cardona (MA), degree coordinator
Donato Vallin González (MA), head of department
Óscar López Corona (Tec.), teacher
Francisco Bernabé Ramos (MA), teacher
Juan Manuel Rodríguez Peña (Eng), teacher
Tania Esmeralda González Robles, student
Miriam Elizabeth Parvol Capetillo, student

Self-evaluation committee - Tourism

Alfonso Zepeda Arce (MA), degree coordinator
Jesús D. Medina García (MA), head of department
Mario Ramírez Vega (MA), teacher
Ana Guadalupe Nuño Rodríguez (MA), teacher
Marcela Isela Vargas Magaña, student
Cruz Europa Medina Zúñiga, student

CUCSUR coordinating committee

Enrique Javier Solórzano Carrillo (MA), chairperson
Alfredo Tomás Ortega Ojeda (MSc), technical secretary
Mónica Araceli Reyes Rodríguez (MA), operations coordinator
Cristina Zepeda Ibarra (BA), assistant
Sandra Eloina Campos (BSc/LCP), assistant

Ana Bertha Ramírez Robles (BSc/LCP, assistant