

Criteria for degree accreditation

The approval process for accreditation criteria

Accreditation by AQU Catalunya is necessary for all new non-recognised university qualifications included in pilot projects for the adaptation of degrees to the European Area of Higher Education (EAHE) prior to completion of the three-year period of introduction.

Accreditation consists of a formal decision by the AQU Catalunya Accreditation Committee, which is based on an appraisal report by a group of experts on compliance of a series of criteria. The first step towards accreditation involves these criteria being established according to international terms of reference. Previous experience and progress in setting up the accreditation procedure in numerous other European countries provide a safeguard for the criteria to be set with the assurance that the process is on course and that any adjustments subsequently made will be fundamentally founded on the resolve for continual improvement as to any change in direction in the process. The adaptation of these criteria to existing terms of reference is therefore fundamental, as is the analysis and discussion of their adaptation to the Catalan university system.

Pursuant to the Catalan Universities Law (*Llei de Universitats de Catalunya, LUC*), it is incumbent on the Quality Assessment Committee (QAC, *Comissió d' Avaluació de la Qualitat*) to set and approve these criteria and that any objections to their application are dealt with by the Standing Committee of the AQU Board of Directors (*Comissió Permanent del Consell de Direcció*). The QAC regulation establishes that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors for Quality Matters (*Comissió de Vicerectors de Qualitat*) can present suggestions and contributions at QAC meetings, which must be duly considered by the committee. Aside from the formal aspects, it is moreover essential for the universities, through their representatives, to regard the criteria that are set as being the most appropriate for convergence with the EAHE. A process of approval has been defined for this purpose to ensure smooth interaction between the parties involved.

The process for establishing the criteria is divided into two stages. The initial stage involves approval of appropriate criteria within the framework of the pilot project. This is then followed in the second stage by the approval of significant evidence and indicators and the setting of normative reference values for each element and criterion.

The first stage consists of the following steps:

- a) The drawing up of a proposal by the Degree and Programme Assessment Committee (*Comissió d' Avaluació de Títols i Programes*)
- b) Analysis and submitting of proposals the Vice-Chancellors for Quality Matters
- c) Discussion and QAC-conditioned approval

- d) Analysis and contributions from the Standing Committee of the AQU Board of Directors
- e) Final approval by the QAC
- f) Publication of the criteria

Framework of reference

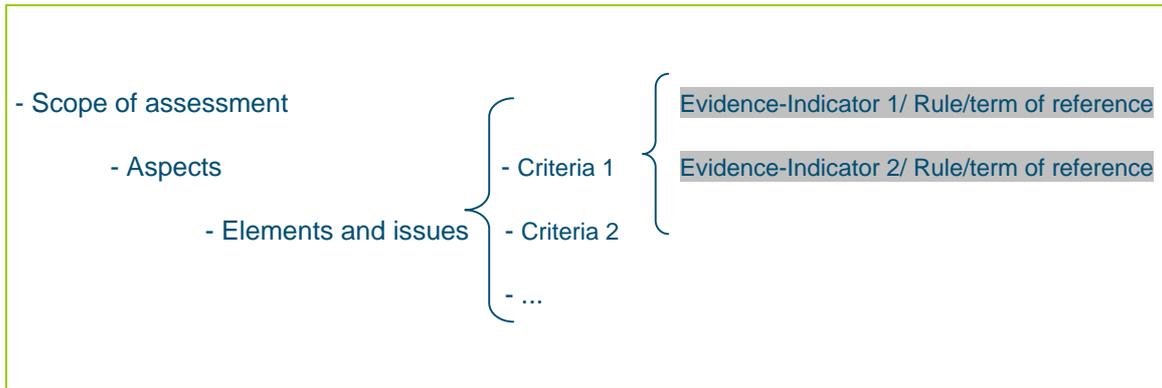
This proposal has been drawn up on the basis of the **Guide to pilot projects for the adaptation of degrees to the European Area of Higher Education**, a pilot project by the Catalan government's Ministry of Universities, Research and the information Society that covers the three-year period of introduction of the new degrees and leads to accreditation of non-recognised degrees awarded by Catalan universities.

The content sections of the guide were used to determine the scope and other aspects and issues to be considered in the accreditation process. The criteria were selected by the specific committee set up for degree and programme assessment (Degree and Programme Assessment Committee) in line with the terms of reference of the four international bodies below:

- Netherlands Accreditation Organisation. Examination framework for new degree courses on higher education. 14 February 2003
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2000) The Competency Criteria. Project: Another Approach to Accreditation Review. Washington, DC
- European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU). Evaluation & Accreditation Criteria. ECIU/EQRC Quality Review Criteria June 2001
- World Federation for Medical Education. WFME Global Criteria for Quality Improvement. 2003

The document presented below takes into account the experimental nature of both the project itself and the proposed criteria in order to give a comprehensive overview of each degree as a whole.

The structure takes in all the sections in the following table except for the sections on evidence and terms of reference (shaded).



A subsequent study involving the interaction of different stakeholders will provide proposals for the evidence (performance indicators) relevant to each element and criterion considered, and also make it possible to feasibly approximate “nominative reference values” to orientate accreditation requirements.

Accreditation criteria

1. General context justifying introduction of the degree

1.1 From the external perspective

The programme of study for the degree requires the prior analysis of quantitative and qualitative aspects such as the characteristics and orientation of the degree (for example, the professional orientation of the anticipated graduate profile, the requirements in a specific discipline, etc.), anticipated academic demand, and possible occupational and vocational demand (economic and social interest with regard to new degree holders), and possible equivalency of the degree with others at the European level. Under the pilot plan, the degree must fulfil the following requirements for breadth of curriculum included in the agreement of the Pilot Plan for adaptation to the EAHA.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Characteristics and orientation of the degree. b) Anticipated academic and occupational demand for the degree. c) Degree equivalency at the European level. d) Strategies for promoting joint degrees with other European universities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Final qualification for the corresponding Bachelor degree (graduate) and Master degree (post-graduate) generally accepted at the international level. – The final qualification is based on requirements laid down by the academic discipline, international academic practice and, where appropriate for the course, relevant practice in forward planning in the professional field. – For new Bachelor and Master degrees, academic, social and/or professional demand justifies proposals to introduce the degree. – The institution affirms the portability of its degree qualifications in the European Area of Higher Education.

Observations:

1.2 From the internal perspective

The analysis of the situation of an institution in order for it to correctly offer a degree course requires consideration of aspects such as leadership and internal support for carrying out the training programme, the necessary personnel and material resources, and synergy with other curricula in the same institution and other universities.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Leadership and internal support for developing the proposal for a new degree. b) Available human and material resources. c) Forward planning with regard to the need for new resources. d) Establishing synergies with other curricula in the same institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Programme objectives are coherent with the institution's mission and strategic plan. – The functions of the academic staff/faculty in charge of the programme are clearly established. – Available evidence of an effective system of communication between the different levels of the institution that provides for the quality and success of the programme. – The institution has adequate/sufficient means to assure users of the quality of the degree being offered.

Observations:

2. Training programme

2.1 The educational profile

The educational profile established in a programme of study is determined through the analysis of the professional competencies that a degree confers, together with the formative requirements and prevailing academic tradition in both Catalonia and internationally.

The specific competencies of the degree course are directly associated with the way that concepts and theories are handled by researchers and professionals, together with the skills required of them.

Additional (transversal) competencies, which are common to most degrees although comparisons may vary, envisage aspects such as ethical values, project and information management, teamwork, oral and written communication in foreign languages, and mobility.

Curricular structure must take credit weighting into account as fitting with the requirements on each level, together with a corresponding sequence and series of subjects in line with the objectives that are formulated.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Definition of the educational profile through identification of specific and additional competencies. b) Adopted structure: the subjects (courses), curricular weight in ECTS in the programme and their descriptors. c) Option and free choice availability in the curriculum. d) Content sequence in the study programme in relation to the established training profile. e) The subjects (courses) with: objectives identifying the most significant competencies (specific and additional), content, learning activities and teaching and evaluation methodology approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The institution has clearly defined the specific and additional competencies required of graduates in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude in relation to their future training and professional needs. – The objectives of the degree have been transferred to the training programme. – The programme must include a coherent group of courses and educational activities that appropriately cover both the fundamental and advanced aspects relating to the subjects envisaged in the programme and duly reviewed. – The programmes specify the objectives, the student workload in relation to ECTS, together with the teaching approach and evaluation methodology.

Observations:

2.2 Approach to the teaching-learning process

There are two basic issues guiding this process, namely the principles that orientate teaching and learning methods and the methodologies put into practice to achieve objectives that have been established.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<p>a) The principles orientating the approach to the teaching-learning process.</p> <p>b) Proposed student learning activities: type and volume of work involved in each course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The educational objectives and subjects that make up the programme, didactic conception, the teaching methods used and the means of evaluation all reflect the academic and professional qualification conferred by the degree course. - The programme must include structured projects or activities where the students apply, either through individual or team work, what they have previously learned to solve specific problems. - A professionally orientated curriculum includes a period of entrepreneurial or institutional internship/training. - The training programme includes a final project that incorporates learning achievements.

Observations:

2.3 Certification and evaluation criteria for academic progress

This section deals with the principles that orientate the assessment of learning and its embodiment in the form of assessment procedures.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The principles orientating the assessment of quality of the teaching-learning process. b) Assessment procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All assessment methods and instruments used to determine student learning achievements must be valid, consistent and in line with the learning objectives laid down in the programme. – The criteria for evaluating student performance (results) by way of a system of assessment are clearly established, they are made publicly available, and they are understood by students and faculty members.

Observations:

2.4 The profile for admission to the degree

Description of the most significant characteristics of new entry students in relation to the established educational profile, together with specific actions by the community for better student adaptation with regard to the demands of the degree course.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<p>a) Description of the most significant characteristics of new entry students in relation to the established educational profile.</p> <p>b) Specific actions by the community for better student adaptation with regard to the demands of the degree course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Admission criteria and entrance requirements are clearly delimited. – The selection of resolution criteria and procedures are clear and made publicly available. – The institution has established specific appropriate actions for the correct academic placing of new entry students.

Observations:

3. Operative planning for the Programme of Study

3.1 Teaching staff / Faculty

This section considers the characteristics of the faculty members involved in the programme.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Type and number of faculty members. b) Informative and training actions for faculty members and administration and services staff. c) Mechanisms for assessing faculty members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Faculty members must have appropriate academic training and experience for the objectives established in the programme. Post-graduate teaching staff must be involved in research activities. – There must be sufficient faculty members to adequately cover teaching and assessment of the different subjects, teacher-student interactions, tutorials, and the management and responsibilities associated with running the programme. – The institution must have written policies for the selection, evaluation and training of faculty members.

Observations:

3.2 Material resources

This section covers the characteristics of teaching classrooms and specific areas for learning, as well as technological resources for achieving and evaluating set competencies.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Teaching classrooms and specific areas for learning. b) Technological resources for learning, and for achieving and evaluating objectives and set competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The institution has the infrastructure, facilities and services for the number students and faculty members to assure the programme is appropriately developed. – The institution has an established policy of agreements with institutions and enterprises that guarantees, where appropriate, professionally orientated placement.

Observations:

3.3 Educational organisation

The analysis in this section refers to the theoretical and practical aspects (in both the classroom/lecture hall and laboratory, as well as in external and professionally orientated placement) of the curriculum, organisation of tutorial groups and students, organisation of assessment activities, and strategies that encourage student mobility in Europe.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Theoretical and practical aspects (both in the classroom/lecture hall and laboratory, as well as external and professionally orientated placement) of the curriculum. b) The organisation of group and individual tutorials. c) Organisation of assessment activities. d) Criteria for options and free choice availability in the curriculum e) Strategies to encourage the mobility of students in Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The programme must be organised so that there is a balance between theoretical and practical aspects. – Organisation of the programme must further the learning process and establish the criteria for learning optimisation (calendars and timetables, teaching plans, assessment and tutorial organisation, the availability of options and free choice, etc.). – The programme must promote student mobility through educational organisation and other specific strategies.

Observations:

4. Monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms

4.1 Educational management and supervision

This section deals with issues such as organisation of the monitoring and quality assurance process and the corresponding bodies responsible for this. Programmes of study must specify how teaching-learning processes are co-ordinated and how they are correspondingly supervised.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The bodies in charge of the monitoring and quality assurance process when the new degree is introduced. b) Procedures for monitoring the introduction of the programme of study, with special attention to the timing of stages and relevant actions. c) Mechanisms to gather and publicise information, and their subsequent use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There is a quality assurance system linked to monitoring and improvement actions that involves the participation of the various stakeholders involved. – The internal quality system must use the results of previous processes that have assessed the degree. – The institution must establish a programme evaluation mechanism that involves all stakeholders, that monitors curriculum implementation and student progress, and guarantees that problems are identified and solved. – There are appropriate mechanisms established in the programme to examine and certify the academic progress of students (student records). – The institution has appropriate tools to collect, analyse and systematically respond to information obtained from students, graduates, faculty members and employers.

Observations:

4.2 Management and evaluation of learning activities (the student's work)

A formative approach orientated towards learning (beyond the technical methods of assessment) requires the setting up of appropriate mechanisms to evaluate student progress

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The system for evaluating student progress (orientated at verifying student knowledge/skills acquisition) b) Formalised tutorial and academic guidance procedures. c) Specific service actions/programmes for student welfare. d) Co-ordination and supervision of the teaching and learning processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Academic results are analysed regularly according to set competencies and used to improve the learning and evaluation processes, as well as being compared with learning achievement criteria. – The programme has established mechanisms for specifying the study requirements for students according to the group of courses taken in a given study period. – The institution must have a student support system, especially for individual, academic and professional tutoring. – Those in charge of co-ordinating and supervising the teaching activities in the programme are identifiable. – The institution has established procedure for collecting, assessing and incorporating suggestions and complaints made by students and for using the information to improve the learning processes.

Observations:

5. Results

This section deals with student results and stakeholder satisfaction, an important criterion for assessing the quality of the degree.

Elements / issues	Criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The level of training acquired. b) The success rate. c) Average duration of studies. d) Student and graduate satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Academic results are a reflection of the level of achievement of the programme's educational objectives. – The success rate must be in line with student characteristics and the level of effort called for in the programme. – It must be possible to successfully complete the programme within the anticipated time, according to the characteristics of the students. Elements associated with the programme that hinder this objective must be identified and corrected as soon as possible. – The results of student and graduate satisfaction correspond to the characteristics and expectations of the programme

Observations: