



STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2022



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



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2019-2022

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INTRODUCTION

In 2001 AQU Catalunya published what was the initial blueprint for a strategic plan for the Agency in its Action Plan for quality enhancement in the university system in Catalonia¹, covering the period up until 2007. The scope of the Action Plan was quickly surpassed as the activities themselves were implemented.

The first actual Strategic Plan (2009-2012) established the fundamentals of the Agency's strategic priorities and was produced by means of a participatory process involving both in-house and external sources. The majority of the strategic and operational objectives were reasonably and effectively met although a few did remain unfulfilled due to the changing context and circumstances.

The Strategic Plan for 2015-2018 was also developed by way of a participatory process. Based on the Agency's prior experience with the previous strategic plan and a SWOT analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the Plan for 2015-2018 set out the six strategic priorities for action by AQU Catalunya, which continue to be applicable to our new annual Action Plan:

- I. Institutional quality
- II. Quality assurance of teaching
- III. Knowledge generation and transfer
- IV. Internationalisation
- V. Strategic management
- VI. Internal organisation

¹ Including institutions providing bachelor-equivalent Arts higher education programmes.

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A total number of 17 strategic goals and 39 operational objectives are defined, which in turn are set out as activities or steps for actual implementation.

Notwithstanding the simplicity and preciseness of the wording of the Strategic Plan for 2015-2018, it contained a series of important ideas for quality enhancement in the university system in Catalonia and, at the same time, of the Agency itself. Examples include a greater focus on institutional review as to programme review; the drive to improve teaching staff assessment in order to make it more useful and efficient as an instrument for teaching staff policies; the enhancement of knowledge generation and transfer as a way of creating added value for higher education and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Catalonia in decision-making; and the readiness to provide support to universities in Catalonia for their internationalisation policies. All of this, together with maintaining our prestige and recognition at international level, improving the levels of stakeholder satisfaction (HEIs, staff and students) and, of course, having competent, flexible and efficient staff.

By December 2018, AQU Catalunya had fulfilled 85% of the commitments set out in its Strategic Plan for the period from 2015-2018. Institutional quality, knowledge generation and transfer and internal organisation were the strategic priorities in which most progress was made, with less progress being made in the area of internationalisation.

With the new Strategic Plan for 2019-2022, the aim is to set out a plan for the Agency that is simple to manage and is as specific as possible, with strategic goals that are fewer in number, but which will have a greater impact on the Agency's activities. Of fundamental importance is the need to ensure that sufficient resources are available to achieve the goals that have been set and that there is the mutual understanding in this regard on the part of the Secretariat for Universities and Research and the university system as a whole in Catalonia. As in the implementation of the previous plan, strategic goals and action steps will be embodied in activities and projects that specify who is accountable and in charge, the timetable for implementation, the goals to be achieved and measurement indicators for follow-up and to evaluate fulfilment of the plan.

MISSION

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya/AQU Catalunya) is an internationally recognised public entity. Its mission is the quality assurance (QA) of higher education in Catalonia in accordance with international quality, academic and social standards, and to safeguard the interests of society in ensuring that higher education fulfils its potential.

The Agency's activities are developed through:

- The defence of democratic and progressive values in higher education.
- The involvement of all social actors in service to the community.
- The work and commitment of people who are competent, motivated and satisfied with a job well done.
- External quality assurance procedures involving analysis, review and evaluation, certification, audit and accreditation.
- International benchmarks and a clear focus on innovation.
- The promotion of transparency and public availability in the university system and the actions of the Agency.

VISION

AQU Catalunya is an independent actor in the university system that works with higher education institutions across Catalonia to assure and enhance the quality of programmes of study, teaching and teaching staff, faculties and schools, for which institutions themselves are ultimately responsible. It works to make a decisive contribution as a knowledge builder at local, national and international levels and to facilitate the quality enhancement of higher education institutions in a global context.

VALUES

AQU Catalunya acts in accordance with the following values, which are laid out in our Code of Ethics. They are classified according to core values and instrumental values.

CORE VALUES

Core values are the intrinsic principles that guide decision-making.

- **Dignity:** Dignity is recognition of the respect for people as ends in themselves. Higher education as a public service also presupposes institutional respect.
- **Independence:** Independence, as a value that safeguards freedom and autonomy, is an expression of individual freedom as well as evaluative, academic and scientific autonomy.
- **Impartiality:** Impartiality safeguards the rigour and objectivity with which the Agency's responsibilities and activities are carried out, without discrimination or *a priori* assumption.
- **Integrity:** Integrity means congruence with the Agency's mandate and all of its procedures and processes. Integrity is highlighted in particular through honesty and the declaration of possible conflicts of interest
- **Innovation and continuous improvement:** Innovation in the Agency's activities contributes to a progressive increase in quality in an ever-changing environment through a cyclical process of systematic reflection and evaluation.
- **Public service:** Public service, which is mainly of an academic and social nature, is a value that underlies all of our activities as a public sector authority at the service of higher education.

CORE VALUES

- **Diversity:** Diversity here refers to the encompassing understanding of different individual academic and scientific situations that present the opportunity for transformation through plurality in the interests of the advancement of higher education. Diversity also includes respect for institutional and organisational plurality.
- **Equity:** The purpose of equity, as a basic human right, is to eliminate the obstacles to equal opportunities, taking into account the specific characteristics of each individual's situation.
- **Trust:** As a value, trust is based on the accumulation over time of activities and attitudes that generate certainty; it is demonstrable (transparent) in the quality and improvement of our actions, it is recognised externally through these actions and it underpins decision-making. Trust is crucial to generating commitment.

INSTRUMENTAL VALUES

Instrumental values refer to the means and processes used to achieve the Agency's goals.

- **Transparency and accountability:** Transparency here refers to the disclosure of information in an easy and understandable way to provide wider and easier access to data and facilitate decision-making. Transparency and accountability mean that all of the work we carry out has to be systematically and timely published in a way that is easy to understand.

INSTRUMENTAL VALUES

- **Cooperation:** Cooperation, as a collective activity that seeks mutual benefit, is based on the collaboration that takes place between all the institutions and people who necessary to carry out the Agency's work through team work and by networking.
- **Efficiency:** Efficiency refers to achieving our goals with the minimum resources and as quickly as possible, according to the requisite level of quality and social, academic and international standards.
- **Internationalisation:** Internationalisation is an open-minded approach to the integration and understanding of new perspectives that emerge on quality in higher education, while fully respecting linguistic pluralism and different concepts and attitudes to the process of continuous improvement, understood as the mutual enrichment of the agents that promote the quality assurance of higher education at international level. Internationalisation as a value promotes multilateralism and the recognition of different ways of working with quality assurance.
- **Competence:** Competence is the integrated and complex set of knowledge, skill, abilities and proficiencies required to perform a specific task at AQU Catalunya, in the workplace and in activities entrusted to external experts and contributors.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTION STEPS



1. To develop innovative actions that impact higher education and the university system in Catalonia

- Implement and consolidate the institutional accreditation of faculties and schools using appropriate methodologies to meet specific objectives.
- Give greater predominance to and promote quality labels, which serve as the recognition of and to distinguish good practices at both programme and institutional level in fields that are strategic to the university system in Catalonia.
- Improve the quality assurance specifications for e-learning programmes within the same framework as other programmes of study.
- Make more intensive use of the outcomes of programme accreditation in the areas of university policy and higher education programming.
- Draw up and publish successful candidate profiles from the preliminary assessment procedures for the pre-recruitment selection of teaching staff as a guide to assessment for prospective applicants.
- Promote the recognition by other QA agencies in Spain of the outcomes of the assessment of teaching staff contracted by AQU Catalunya.
- Adapt all stages of quality assurance involving institutional and programme review, including teaching staff assessment, to online processing.

- Publish new studies in the field of social equity, on the one hand, and graduate destinations and the transition into employment, on the other.



2. Facilitate integrated access to quantitative and qualitative data for use in quality assurance and enhancement in the university system in Catalonia

- Set up an "observatory of talent" in Catalonia in order to better understand in real time the skills that are required in the labour market and to better match the needs of employers with those of graduates and higher education institutions.
- Set up a catalogue of indicators for the university system in Catalonia and a consultation mechanism to support QA procedures.
- Complete the repository of quantitative and qualitative data for all levels of study programme for the development of both strategic and continuous improvement approaches and to analyse and generate new knowledge.
- Update the various websites maintained by AQU Catalunya, in particular the corporate website to ensure accessibility and the Agency's specific web portals (EUC/Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya) that guide prospective students in the selection of degree courses and for greater transparency in the running of the university system in Catalonia, especially for teaching staff and stakeholders.
- Consolidate the gathering of data for use in QA systems, in particular student satisfaction surveys.



3. Underpin the international position of both AQU Catalunya and the university system in Catalonia

- Increase participation in forums and projects and give impetus to quality assurance activities, with priority being given to Europe and Latin America.
- Provide impetus for the assessment of internationalisation as an additional dimension of programme accreditation for degree programmes that comply with requisite standards.



4. Maintain the expertise of in-house staff and external experts and contributors so that they feel committed to the activity they are involved in and are capable of embracing change

- Promote the continuous training of experts involved in the Agency's QA procedures to reinforce their understanding of the objectives of quality assurance and consistency in the application of QA criteria.
- Enhance the level of training of students in higher education QA procedures.
- Reinforce the Agency's staff training programme through the placement of staff with other QA agencies and meetings to discuss ways in which other agencies and external review programmes function.
- Analyse the aspects and scope of social responsibility applicable to AQU Catalunya, and address these.



5. **Have at its disposal the necessary funding and adequate human resources and facilities to address all planned activities**
 - Press for the drawing up of the four-year contract programme with the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) and for this to match the Agency's human and physical resources with its needs, and give impetus to its approval, adoption and implementation.
 - Balance the number of the Agency's activities against its available human and physical resources.

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