



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

# CODE OF ETHICS



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

# CODE OF ETHICS

## AQU CATALUNYA

Barcelona, 2019

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

C. dels Vergós, 36-42

08017 Barcelona

Original title (in Catalan): Codi ètic

Translation by: Charles Southgate

First edition: July 2019

The contents of this guide are covered by a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 license. Their reproduction, distribution and public communication are permitted provided that the name of the author is stated and that they are not used for commercial purposes.

For the full license, see:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/legalcode>



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	5
VALUES .....	6
COMMITMENTS .....	9
COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF ETHICS .....	13
WORKING GROUP .....	14

### INTRODUCTION

This is the third version of the code of ethics for the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya/AQU Catalunya) since the Agency was founded in 1996.

This new Code of Ethics is written in a straightforward yet inspiring way and is guided by the principle of continuous improvement above and beyond the scope of compliance with laws and regulations governing the administrative and legal activities of the Agency and its staff.

The section on values sets out the guidelines for the conduct and behaviour of AQU Catalunya staff and external experts and contributors, together with the commitments that stem from the Code, to ensure appropriate ethical conduct and encourage good practices in the Agency's role as a quality assurance agency.

The values defined in the Agency's Code of Ethics are the features considered to be both appreciable and ideal, with the distinction being made between core values, or the intrinsic guiding principles of decision-making, and instrumental values, which refer to the means and processes used to achieve the Agency's goals.

The commitments embody the practical implementation of the values.

The final section on compliance sets out our commitment to evaluating the efficacy of measures to promote compliance with this Code of Ethics.

The Code is to be used as an ethical road map to encourage the Agency, its staff and outside contributors to fulfil an attitude and help realise a vision through the commitments that it entails.

Compliance with and the adoption of the values set out in the AQU Catalunya Code of Ethics will depend on the active engagement of the Agency's governing and review bodies, the staff and outside experts and other contributors and will need to be maintained over time with awareness-raising actions, training and follow-up assessment.

## 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 undertaken, without discrimination or any *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 by way of 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.

#### 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.

## CODE OF ETHICS

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.

### **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.

## CODE OF ETHICS

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.



## COMMITMENTS

Without commitments, values are nothing more than ideals or declarations of intent. The commitment to values and the feeling of being impelled by one's own values is ethically transforming and makes the individual liable for his or her actions. Details of the commitment corresponding to each of the above values are given below.

### **Independence is the commitment to act freely and responsibly in the performance of one's duties**

The governing bodies of AQU Catalunya undertake to exercise their powers and responsibilities in an autonomous manner and without regard to pressure or influence.

In the performance of their duties reviewers and external experts and contributors undertake to act solely and exclusively in the interest of the service that they provide to AQU Catalunya, pursuant to their expertise and in accordance with the Agency's standards and assignments, without regard to any professional group that they may form part of.

### **Impartiality is the commitment to be objective and to act with equanimity**

AQU Catalunya staff undertake to conduct their duties impartially and without discrimination.

Reviewers and external experts and contributors undertake to carry out their work without any *a priori* assumption, to declare any conflict of interests and, where appropriate, to abstain from decision-making when a conflict of interest arises in quality assurance procedures and duties assigned to them by the Agency.

### **Integrity is the commitment to act in accordance with legal requirements by taking care to fulfil all criteria and reporting malpractice**

Integrity is the commitment to act in a coherent way according to the values set out in this Code of Ethics.

### **Innovation is the commitment to foster creativity in the fulfilment of the Agency's responsibilities as a QA agency in furtherance of continuous improvement**

Innovation and continuous improvement is our commitment to self-critical analysis of the

## CODE OF ETHICS

Agency's management procedures in order to bring about quality enhancement in our role as a quality assurance agency, together with value addition for both higher education and society as a whole.

### **Public service is the commitment to act as public servants in all of our activities**

AQU Catalunya staff and reviewers shall base the performance of their responsibilities and duties on the common good, which answers to the general interest of society and includes compliance with both academic and social standards.

The outcomes of the Agency's quality assurance procedures and other functions shall be reported in a constructive way to provide guidance on ways to best overcome shortcomings and promote potential that is identified.

### **Diversity is the commitment to integrating the plurality of different perspectives on quality**

The Agency's bodies and reviewers are committed to the conscientious search for methodological and epistemological plurality.

### **Equity is the commitment to be mindful of people and institutions and attentive to**

### **different social and institutional contexts**

Equity is the commitment to equal opportunity, taking into account the specific nature of any given situation of a person or institution.

### **Trust is the commitment to always be honest regarding the activities that the Agency is entrusted with**

Correct fulfilment of the responsibilities and duties by AQU Catalunya's governing bodies, staff and reviewers builds trust, which ensures a good working environment and the optimum fulfilment of our role as a quality assurance agency, and leads to the subsequent recognition and respect for our work by higher education institutions.

The commitment to honesty means correcting mistakes and shortcomings that are identified and apologising for inconvenience or encumbrance.

### **Transparency is our commitment to the Agency's capability to positively impact and transform the university system, and accountability is our commitment to enhanced efficiency**

All of the Agency's activities, outcomes and results must be timely released and published. All procedures, standards, instruments, decision-

## CODE OF ETHICS

making mechanisms and the list of contributing reviewers and experts should also be made public. Publication of the outcomes and the updating of indicators provides for the traceability of all of the Agency's actions, with due regard for the protection of confidential information.

The traceability and assessment of the impact of our reports and feedback templates rely on transparency, as this increases their impact and potential for transformation.

Accountability should not be just of an economic nature, but should also include the institutional guarantee of adequate human and physical resources.

### **Cooperation is the commitment to participating in a loyal and trustworthy way in activities involving the quality enhancement of higher education and practicing active listening**

Cooperation with other quality assurance entities and institutions of higher education ensures the broader development of the functions and procedures of the group of cooperating entities.

Cooperation should give rise to the transfer and exchange of good practices and experiences between the various cooperating entities.

Cooperation is a commitment to team-working and networking in order to achieve set objectives, with an enrichment and complementarity that an individual working alone cannot achieve.

Cooperation also involves the active participation of the stakeholder groups involved in quality assurance procedures, including students, teaching staff, researchers and professionals.

### **Efficiency is the commitment to cut red tape and streamline the endorsement of all review and evaluation procedures and other tasks that the Agency is responsible for**

Efficiency is the commitment to both economic and staff sustainability to ensure the viability of the responsibilities and assignments entrusted to the Agency.

Efficiency is also the commitment to accomplish proposed aims with minimum resources and in the shortest time possible, and the advancement of those who undergo assessment.

### **Internationalisation is the commitment to be open to new trends in quality assurance in**

## CODE OF ETHICS

### **higher education and to promote the recognition of good practices**

With the objective of continuous quality improvement and enhancement and service to society, AQU Catalunya, its experts and outside contributors are open to new initiatives, standards and procedures that result from developments in the field of European and international higher education.

International cooperation increases the value of our understanding of and experience with the services that we offer in the field of quality assurance. This increases mutual trust between different university systems and provides the basis for reciprocal recognition in higher education.

### **Competence is the commitment to personal, technical, methodological and inclusive capability.**

Our staff strive to achieve excellence in the activities carried out by the Agency, through their thoroughness, accuracy and impartiality at work and through due professional diligence.

AQU Catalunya staff, experts and outside contributors are ethically obliged to keep their training and job skills current, in particular those associated with quality assurance. The Agency must provide adequate training for staff to

maintain and upgrade their level of expertise and professionalism.

Being part of AQU Catalunya thereby confers prestige and professional authority on the Agency's staff, experts and outside contributors.

## COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF ETHICS

There are three cornerstones to the efficacy of, and resulting compliance with, the provisions of this Code of Ethics: the promotion of ethics training, the instruments to promote compliance with the values and commitments, and the monitoring and revision of the Code.

### Promotion of ethics training

We will train our staff, experts and outside contributors in the use and understanding of the values and commitments set out in this Code of Ethics, and we will organise courses and workshops for debate and discussion to ensure their dissemination at university level.

The Code of Ethics will be published in both printed and electronic formats. Each member of the Agency's staff will also receive a copy when they undertake to comply with the code.

### Compliance

AQU Catalunya will ensure observance of the commitments laid down in this code through the Agency's governing bodies and in particular the Governing Board.

### Monitoring and revision of the Code of Ethics

The Agency is to set up an Ethics Monitoring Committee, the functions of which are the interpretation, oversight, mediation and study of the provisions laid down in the Code of Ethics, together with periodic updates.

The composition of this committee shall be endorsed by the Governing Board, on the recommendation of the president of AQU Catalunya.

## WORKING GROUP

The working group in charge of producing the new CODE OF ETHICS consisted of Esther Giménez-Salinas, emeritus professor of Criminal Law and Criminology, and Jordi Escolar, advisor to AQU Catalunya, on the legal side; and from the field of philosophy, Begoña Román, PhD, and Marina Garcés, PhD, both of whom are experts in ethics and contemporary thought.

The joint work of this multi-disciplinary team has produced a pluralistic document that offers a comprehensive perspective and gives added value to the new wording of the Code.

Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya  
July 2019 · AQU-27-2019



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



[www.aqu.cat](http://www.aqu.cat)



@aqucatalunya