



# GUIDE TO THE ASSESSMENT OF FOREIGN CENTRES

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# INTRODUCTION

## Aim of this guide

The internationalisation of higher education is something that is becoming increasingly consolidated and which comes in a range of formats, such as programmes aimed at attracting students from other countries, joint training programmes, academic mobility programmes and the establishment of franchises. The development of measures to guarantee the quality of this internationalisation has become a relevant issue, not only to guarantee the rights of the different users, but also to think of new structures that take advantage of its potential.

Cross-border teaching is one of the variants in which the internationalisation of higher education is materialised, and the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) is responsible for the task of quality assurance. In accordance with the Law on Universities in Catalonia (LUC), teaching institutions wishing to offer courses leading to degrees awarded by institutions in other countries must be assessed by the Agency before being authorised by the Catalan Government department responsible for universities.

On the basis of Recommendation No. 97 of the Committee of Ministers of 4 February 1997 ([Recognition and Quality Assessment of Private Institutions of Higher Education](#)), this methodology responds to the need to:

- > Protect the legal and academic value of higher education qualifications.
- > Protect public and private higher education institutions from unfair competition.
- > Protect students and families from being attracted to institutions that are not recognised by the higher education system by using elements that lead to biased information.
- > Protect employers from hiring people with unrecognised qualifications.

The conclusions of the conference organised by The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) on quality assurance in cross-border education<sup>1</sup> state that the same factors that apply to quality assurance and assessment in national higher education should also apply to cross-border education, even if provided, directly or indirectly, by an institution in another country. This means that the cultural context in which the cross-border programme is delivered must be taken into account and respected. Indeed, the implementation by higher education institutions of a successful international strategy requires long-term investment and sensitivity to both local cultural concerns and academic quality concerns. Furthermore, it should also be borne in mind that higher education,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Bennett et al, [Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education](#), ENQA Workshop Report 11 (Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2010).

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whether cross-border or not, is a public asset and a public responsibility and should not be seen as a commercial practice.

As regards the assessment procedure, it stresses the need for communication with the quality assurance bodies of the country in which the university awarding the degree is registered. Communication and the sharing of information are key to building trust and eliminating potential duplication in assessment processes (ENQA, 2016). The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) also includes this aspect within the framework of standards applicable to institutions that organise external review processes for cross-border education:

“When engaging in quality assurance activity of cross-border providers the External Quality Assurance Provider should seek to liaise with the relevant quality assurance and regulatory authority in the jurisdiction in which the reviewed provider is based. The purpose is to both inform its due diligence about the reviewed provider and explore ways in which it might be possible to cooperate in the quality assurance activity, if applicable.”<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this guide is to determine the potential of the teaching institution established in Catalonia to adequately deliver the degree programmes designed by the institution awarding the degree. This potential is assessed by ensuring compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*<sup>3</sup> and alignment with the *Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of higher education institutions*.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, this guide also achieves the following objectives:

- > Provide institutions with detailed information on the review process for centres offering foreign qualifications in Catalonia, so that they can act accordingly and strengthen those aspects that are considered to be of particular significance in the review.
- > Ensure that both those responsible for offering foreign qualifications and those reviewing their proposal share the same benchmarks.

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<sup>2</sup> The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), UNESCO WHEC 2022 *Open Knowledge Product, International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education*.

<sup>3</sup> EHEA Ministerial Conference, [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#) (ENQA, 15 May 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, [Standards and criteria for the institutional accreditation of university centres](#), 1st ed. (Barcelona: AQU CATALUNYA, 2020).

### Regulations

This guide incorporates the conditions established in applicable regulations, which are as follows:

- a) Royal Decree 640/2021, of 27 July, on the creation, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, and the institutional accreditation of university centres; especially Chapter IV, on centres that teach courses leading to the acquirement of foreign university and higher education degrees analogous to university education.

Article 15, on the authorisation of centres that provide education in accordance with foreign education systems, establishes that:

“The provision of university and higher education courses (diplomas or certificates) analogous to university education in our country by centres in accordance with foreign education systems will require the authorisation of the competent body of the corresponding Autonomous Community in which the university or centre is located, in accordance with article 86 of Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December. In no case shall higher education courses analogous to university education refer to Spanish qualifications corresponding to non-university higher education courses.”

Article 16 establishes the requirements for authorisation, which include:

- Submission of a development plan for the academic offering;
- Compliance with teaching staff ratios established in paragraphs 4 to 7 of Article 7 of the Royal Decree;<sup>5</sup>
- Proof that the courses offered are implemented in the foreign institution issuing the degree;

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<sup>5</sup> «4. The total number of teaching and research staff members at a university must not fall below a 1/25 ratio in relation to the total number of students enrolled in official university courses. This ratio shall apply to full-time teaching and research staff, or the part-time equivalent.

»5. The ratio set out in paragraph 4 above may be adapted when the university offers online teaching, and may range between 1/25 and 1/50 depending on the degrees' level of practical application and the volume of in-person teaching provided. Justified exceptions may be granted, which under no circumstances shall exceed a ratio of 1/100. These exceptions must have explicit authorization from the competent authority.

»6. The teaching and research staff at universities shall consist of, at least:

»a) 50% doctorate holders for all courses leading to official university bachelor's degrees, and for all courses leading to official university master's degrees.

»b) 100% doctorate holders for courses leading to doctorate degrees.

»c) The doctorate holders referred to in the previous sections must belong to fields of knowledge consistent with the university's teaching and research programme.

»7. For these purposes, the total number of teaching staff members will be calculated based on the full-time equivalent. Moreover, as stipulated in the twelfth additional provision of Organic Law 6/2001 of 21 December, in the field of Health Sciences, the number of part-time faculty position for a professional positions determined in agreements between universities and healthcare institutions shall not be taken into consideration for the purposes of the percentages indicated in this article.

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- Proof that the curricula correspond in structure, duration and content to those of the parent institution;
- Proof that the degree has equivalent official validity in the country of origin and the same designation;
- Submission of the degrees offered to assessment, accreditation and inspection processes in the corresponding foreign university system;
- Provision of a written commitment guaranteeing the continuity of the studies offered in the event of cessation of operation by the university or centre; and
- Degrees that have not previously undergone an assessment process by the quality assurance institution or agency in the country of origin cannot be authorised.

- b) Law 1/2003 of 19 February on universities in Catalonia (LUC). Regarding educational centres issuing foreign degrees, Article 113 states that:

“1. The department responsible for universities shall be responsible for authorising educational centres that wish to establish themselves in Catalonia to offer, under any modality, courses of study leading to higher university degrees that are not recognised as official university degrees, and for revoking their authorisation.

2. The authorisation referred to in paragraph 1 requires a prior favourable report from the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, in accordance with the quality standards that the Agency has drawn up for this type of centre.”

And Article 114, on inspection and the verification of requirements, establishes that:

“The department responsible for universities shall be in charge of inspections to ensure that universities and university centres comply with the requirements established by the regulations in force in relation to the actions regulated under this chapter and, where appropriate, with the commitments made by the owners of the universities and private university centres.”

- c) Law 15/2015 of 21 July on the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency. Article 3.1 provides that the Agency has, inter alia, the following tasks:

“b) The assessment, certification, audit and accreditation of the quality of universities, their research and innovation centres, and of higher education centres.

c) The assessment, certification, monitoring and accreditation, in accordance with international academic and social standards, of the courses leading to the award of official and non-official degrees awarded by universities and other higher education centres.”

## The authorisation process and the adaptation process

As stated in Article 15 of Royal Decree 640/2021, the authorisation process is a requirement in order to be able to provide higher education courses. Authorisation guides must therefore follow an ex-ante assessment logic, envisaging the review of the design of the



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admission, progress and recognition policies, or of the planned structure of teaching staff, but without being able to assess the outcomes.

However, transitional provision one of Royal Decree 640/2021 provides for the adaptation of universities and centres to the requirements of this same royal decree in the following situations:

- > Universities and university centres that already have authorisation.
- > Universities and centres that are already established or recognised but not authorised.
- > Universities and centres providing university education or higher education degrees analogous to university education under foreign education systems.

This guide is aimed at:

- > Centres that are already in operation and are included in this third group of adaptations provided for in Royal Decree 640/2021. In this case, the review is not, therefore, designed to authorise the design of a course of education, rather it applies to centres that are already in operation and, as such, it is an accreditation (or ex-post assessment) process.
- > Centres within the same group that are in operation but have not started the degree to be analysed. In this case, the review process is conceived to authorise the design of a course of education.

## International references

The international references that have been drawn on for this methodology include:

- > Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2015). [Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation](#). Wilmington: MSCHE.
- > The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education. (2019). [Accreditation Handbook](#). London: BAC.
- > Paul Bennett et al. (2010). [Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education](#) (ENQA Workshop Report 11). Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- > Tariq Al-Sandi et al. (2016). [Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education](#) (ENQA Occasional Papers 23). Brussels: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- > The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). (2022). *International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education* (UNESCO WHEC 2022 Open Knowledge Product).

### Internal references

Finally, this methodology is based on the following references published by AQU Catalunya:

- > [Guide to the assessment of institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia](#) (AQU Catalunya, 2011, 2016).
- > [Agreement on the assessment of foreign institutions](#) (CAIP, 12/07/21).
- > [Standards and criteria for the institutional accreditation of university centres](#) (AQU Catalunya, 2020).

## REVIEW ORGANISATION AND PLANNING

### Review Commissions

#### External Review Committees (CAEs)

The review process must include a visit to the institution by an External Review Committee (CAE). This committee is responsible for drawing up an external review report, which is the key element in the decision that will ultimately be taken by the Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment (CEAI) of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP).

The CAE must be made up of at least four people with the following profiles:

##### **1. The Chair**

Must be a member of teaching and research staff with an acknowledged track record as a doctoral lecturer. Candidates from the Spanish Higher Education System should preferably have passed two positive research premium assessments or meet equivalent requirements.

As a general rule, the CAE should be chaired by the most senior academic who has held a position of responsibility in governing bodies.

They must have experience in the management of centres or institutions.

Experience in international assessments is also an asset.

##### **2. One academic member for each of the fields of knowledge assessed**

They must be a member of teaching and research staff and have an acknowledged track record as a doctoral lecturer. Candidates from the Spanish higher education system should preferably have passed two positive research premium assessments or meet equivalent requirements.

Experience in international assessments is also an asset.

##### **3. One student**

Undergraduate and/or postgraduate student, preferably with experience in institution or training programme assessment processes.

##### **4. The secretary**

Expert in quality assessment methodology in higher education systems. Preferably, this person should be a member of technical staff from a quality agency or a university QA unit (UTQ) with experience in quality assurance systems and quality assessment of degrees, institutions or teaching staff.

Experience in international assessments is also an asset.

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If necessary, the CAE may be advised by an external economic and financial specialist.

The Chair of the CAIP is responsible for appointing the members of the CAE. The appointed members must guarantee their independence, objectivity, absence of conflict of interest, and a commitment to ethics and confidentiality. Committee members should therefore be external to the institution they are assessing and have no links with it.

### **The Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment**

The Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment (CEAI), created by agreement of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), is responsible, among others, for drawing up and approving the external assessment report. This report will be based primarily on the evidence from the external visit report drawn up by the CAE.

In accordance with the criterion of transparency, the composition and curricula vitae of the members of the CEAI shall be published on the AQU Catalunya website.

### **Appeals Commission**

The department responsible for universities of the Government of Catalonia may ask AQU Catalunya to issue a report reviewing the assessment carried out. In this case, the Appeals Commission is the committee responsible for issuing the corresponding reports, and shall apply the procedure approved by the AQU Catalunya institutional and programme review, certification and/or accreditation commissions.

## The review process

### Description of the review process

The main stages of the review process are as follows:

1. **Application for authorisation.** The institution must formally apply for the authorisation of centres that teach programmes based on foreign educational systems in the Procedures section (<https://web.gencat.cat/en/tramits/>) of the Government of Catalonia website. The following documentation must also be submitted together with the application:
  - Diplomatic certification (embassy or consulate), with certified translation into Catalan or Spanish, accrediting the implementation of the studies at the university, the correspondence of the syllabuses with those of the university of origin, the validity of the degrees issued, and the assessment and accreditation to which these studies are subject, in accordance with the regulations of the higher education system of the country where the degree is awarded.
  - Report on the programme implementation plan (degrees, type, level, places offered, duration, credits, year of implementation) and the applicant institution's teaching staff with the minimum content and format indicated on the Procedures section of the Catalan Government website.
  - In the event that the centre is an affiliate or franchise of the foreign university, an agreement establishing the academic links between the two parties must be submitted, with a sworn translation into Catalan or Spanish.
  - Self-assessment report of the institution offering a degree programme in Catalonia in accordance with the academic and legal system of another country, and the response to the Protocol for the university issuing the degree (see Annex 2).
2. **Documentation analysis.** The department responsible for universities must analyse the legal aspects established in the regulation.
3. **Submission of documentation to AQU Catalunya.** The department responsible for universities must submit the documentation to AQU Catalunya provided that the documentation analysis (point 2) has been resolved favourably. At this time, AQU Catalunya will contact the centre to explain the standard procedure for the assessment process. The centre will have 10 days to submit a self-assessment report and evidence in line with the dimensions of this guide.
4. **Ex-ante assessment.** The ex-ante assessment starts after a minimum preparatory period of 3 months from the end of phase 3. In this phase, the members of the CAE carry out an individual review by analysing the documentation and evidence

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presented by the centre. Further additional evidence may be requested if necessary.

5. **The visit.** The main objective of this phase is to gain on-the-ground knowledge of the institution's potential to adequately deliver the training programmes and of the internal quality assurance mechanisms. The evidence provided has to be checked and verified, any controversies or disagreements detected and, if necessary, new evidence obtained so that any aspects not considered in the documentation provided can be assessed.

One day is considered to be sufficient time to visit most institutions.

6. **Drawing up the external assessment report (visit report).** The CAE must agree on the content of the visit report, and subsequently the president of the committee validates the report. The visit report is sent to AQU Catalunya within a maximum period of four weeks (not including holiday periods) after the visit. AQU Catalunya shall send the visit report (preliminary version) to the centre for review. The centre has fifteen calendar days to report possible factual errors identified in the visit report. In the event that the centre reports factual errors, the CAE will analyse them and review the visit report in its final version. If in this period the centre does not report any factual errors, the preliminary visit report will be considered the final version.
7. **Decision.** The CEAI shall draw up the external assessment report based on the CAE's visit report. In the decision, the CEAI may disagree with the assessments included in the external assessment visit report, setting out the reasons for doing so. The CEAI can ask the CAE for additional information, clarifications, and so on, before making its decision.

The centre may submit remarks regarding the CEAI's preliminary report, within a period of

twenty working days from its issuance. Once the remarks submitted, if any, have been assessed, the CEAI shall draw up the final decision report and a report in response to the remarks. In the event that the centre does not submit any remarks, the pre-decision report shall be considered as the final report.

8. **Issue of the final report.** Within approximately one month, the CAIP will issue the final report to the competent department for universities, to the institution and to the body responsible for quality in the institution's country of origin. This report shall be issued as favourable, favourable with conditions or unfavourable.
9. **Publication of the result.** AQU Catalunya will publish the results of the review process on its website.
10. **Authorisation decision and publication in the DOGC.** The department responsible for universities shall, where appropriate, request and assess the relevant reports related to the legal aspects of the project (reports on university programming and

planning, academic staff, infrastructure, financial and legal aspects). Once all the reports have been drawn up and are available, within a period of six months the ministry responsible for universities shall issue the corresponding decision either granting or denying authorisation. In accordance with article 22.1.d of Law 30/2015 of 1 October on the common administrative procedure for public administrations, the decision may be suspended for a period of three months if prior notice is given to the educational centre.

This decision may be appealed against by means of an optional appeal for reconsideration.

11. **Issue of the review report by the Appeals Commission.** In the event that the centre has lodged an appeal for reconsideration with the competent department and some of the arguments submitted relate to the report issued by the CEAI, the department may submit the appeal to AQU Catalunya, and the Appeals Commission will issue a review report.. This review report shall not take into account any arguments referring to facts or documents occurring or produced after the issuance of the CEAI report.

Once the review report has been issued, the Appeals Commission will send it to the department.

12. **Resolution of appeals for reconsideration.** Appeals for reconsideration shall be decided on by the department responsible for universities.

## DIMENSIONS ASSESSED

Each dimension is presented with the standard and sub-standards, the way in which AQU Catalunya will assess whether they have been met, and the evidence and indicators the centre may provide to demonstrate that it has met the corresponding standards.

### Dimension 1. Policies and strategy

**The centre has a formally adopted strategy and policies, with the participation of stakeholders, to strengthen and develop the quality and relevance of training programmes on an ongoing basis.**

- > The centre has defined a strategy whose objectives are reflected in indicators that make it possible to measure the extent to which they have been achieved.
- > The centre has quality assurance policies that include scope, values, and goals to be achieved.
- > Processes are clearly defined for approval, review and improvement.
- > The chain of responsibility and the parties responsible are clearly identified in the decision-making process.
- > Policies are reported and results are made accountable to stakeholders.
- > The risks involved in the strategy to be implemented and those which may arise have been identified and preventive measures have been planned.

In the review of the centre, AQU Catalunya will wish to verify the ownership of the centre, its legal status and its track record in terms of higher education provision in Catalonia and, where applicable, in the rest of Spain and abroad.

The foreign centre must provide evidence of its relationship with the university responsible for the degree(s) it offers. This relationship must be legally established through the relevant legal mechanisms. It is important that the centre can show what degree approval, monitoring and accreditation mechanisms have been followed by the university responsible for the degree or the agencies and authorities in the university's country.

AQU Catalunya will want to check the adequacy of the structures and decision-making of the centre's governing bodies. For this reason, the centre must keep a record of all the activities of its governing bodies to demonstrate the scope, detail and diligence of its governance. This documentation must also provide evidence of stakeholder participation in decision-making.

The centre must have policies and objectives in place for the higher education it offers. These policies should cover the fundamental aspects of the teaching-learning process: the centre's educational model, the academic courses it offers and their evolution, the



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recruitment and admission of new students, the recruitment, hiring, training and management of teaching staff and other teaching support staff, and the provision and maintenance of the physical and technological infrastructure and student support services. If the centre has foreign students or teaching staff, the relevance of the internationalisation policy will be checked as well as the mechanisms for student and teaching staff mobility. AQU Catalunya will not assess the manner or method used to plan these quality policies and objectives, but rather whether they respond to the needs of the centre and ensure the relevance and suitability of the university education.

The centre must respect Catalan and Spanish legal regulations regarding university education. In particular, the application of the rules of coexistence, of effective equality between men and women, and of non-discrimination on grounds of birth, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance will be verified.

It would be highly desirable if the centre could show the actions it has implemented in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

As regards the centre's financial viability, it shall be verified that it has a sound financial position and that there are controls in place to ensure this. If there are contingency and risk mitigation plans, it is important that these be provided. In any case, it will be necessary to check the guarantees offered by the centre to ensure that enrolled students can continue their studies in the event of that the centre ceases to operate.

Apart from the affiliation agreement (E1), the centre's organisation chart (E2) and the protocol completed by the awarding university (E42, see annex 2), the following **evidence** can be provided to help the centre demonstrate these standards:

- > E3. Regulations of the centre's governing bodies and commissions (including composition)
- > E4. Strategic plan or similar
- > E5. Dashboard or similar
- > E6. Improvement plan(s)
- > E7. Financial reports and internal and external audit reports, audited company financial statements or other documentation showing the financial viability of the centre (private and affiliated centres)
- > E8. Map of the centre's degree courses
- > E9. Accreditation of the implementation and validity of the degrees offered by the centre in the university of origin with the same name, structure, duration, content and validity
- > E10. Other specific reports analysing the current training offer and possible future changes

- > E11. Entry and admission criteria for students
- > E12. Human resources policy: profile and recruitment of teachers and administrative and services staff
- > E13. Distance learning policy
- > E14. Gender Equality Plan and its results
- > E15. Protocol for the prevention, detection and action against situations of sexual and other forms of harassment based on sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, and other types of sexist behaviour
- > E16. Other of the centre's rules and regulations related to the teaching-learning process

## Dimension 2. Design, approval and implementation of training programmes

**The centre has implemented processes for the design and approval of its programmes that result in curricula that respond adequately to the content and training objectives of the degree courses. The learning outcomes correspond to the level of these degrees, in accordance with the corresponding national qualifications framework. And the timing of its implementation and allocation of teaching staff are relevant and appropriate.**

This dimension corresponds to the agency or institution responsible for the quality assurance of the degree-awarding institution in the country of origin. Centres whose teaching has not previously been reviewed by the quality body or agency of the country of origin may not be authorised (Royal Decree 640/2021, Article 16.e). AQU Catalunya and its accreditation commissions and committees may make recommendations, but under no circumstances may they impose requirements regarding the design of the syllabus.

In any case, AQU Catalunya will want to check that the relevant processes have been followed in the country of origin for the approval and assessment of the degrees awarded by the centre, so as to ensure they are equivalent to the degrees awarded by the university that endorses them.

The process implemented by the centre for phasing out degree programmes when necessary and how the process guarantees the rights of enrolled students will be assessed.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E17. Authorisation and/or accreditation reports relating to the awarding university
- > E18. Teaching guides (especially bachelor's/master's degree final or similar projects and assignments, internships, etc.)

- > E19. Written commitment to continue the studies offered in the event that the university or centre ceases to operate, until the students enrolled in the said courses have adequately completed them (Royal Decree 640/2021, article 16.f)

### Dimension 3. Student admission, progress, recognition and certification

**The centre has processes in place for fair, reliable, equitable and public student access and admission processes. The procedures implemented make it possible to reliably certify students' progress and the achievement of learning outcomes and to recognise previously achieved learning outcomes.**

- > The processes implemented for student access and admission ensure fairness, reliability and non-discrimination on the grounds of birth, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance.
- > The criteria and requirements for access and admission are clear and public.
- > All students admitted have the appropriate profile to achieve the learning outcomes of the degree and their number is consistent with the number of places offered.
- > The centre has implemented appropriate and efficient procedures for monitoring the progress of students and guiding them academically and personally.
- > Procedures for recognising students' prior learning are in place, relevant, and applied appropriately.
- > The procedure for the certification of student learning achievements and the passing of credits for the award of the degree is appropriate and conforms to the applicable regulations in force in each case.

As regards access and admission, the centre will be assessed to ensure it has a clear, up-to-date and regularly reviewed process that is suitable for the level of degree programme and that it requires students to have adequate academic preparation to guarantee the expected academic profile. Admission criteria will be checked to see if they guarantee equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility for people with disabilities. The centre must keep a register of all decisions on admissions to its degree programmes and the fair and consistent application of criteria will be checked.

Information on access and admission criteria must be accurate and publicly available sufficiently in advance of enrolment. Responsibility for the admission process to the centre's degree programmes must be well and clearly established.

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Both the number of incoming students and the centre's capacity to train all students must be consistent with the number of offered places.

In terms of student progress, the centre should monitor student progress and take measures if problems are identified. Within student support, it will be checked that the tutorial action plan and other accompanying and mentoring programmes are adequate in ensuring reasonable student progress and, in the specific case of first-year students, that they allow for a successful transition. The rules and regulations should be made public and known to students, and will be checked for their appropriateness to the degree programmes offered by the centre.

The centre must have approved and implemented a credit recognition and transfer regulation. If the degrees offered correspond to a university or higher education institution within the European Higher Education Area, the recognition shall respect the precepts of the Lisbon Convention.<sup>6</sup> The recognition should also include previous work and professional experience, if the legislation in the state of the foreign university allows it.

The procedure for issuing degrees should correspond to that established by the foreign university or higher education institution.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E20. Related processes and procedures (access and admission, monitoring of student progress and certification of learning achievements, identification of specific student needs)
- > E21. Regulations and criteria for credit recognition (including work and professional experience)
- > E22. Rules for permanence
- > E23. Transition and reception plan for new student entrants
- > E24. Profile of new students

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**:

- > I1. Ratio of demand/places offered
- > I2. Ratio of students enrolled/places offered
- > I3. Percentage of students who have taken and passed the Spanish university entrance exams

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<sup>6</sup> Council of Europe, [Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region](#), 165 ETS § (1999).

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- > 14. Profile of incoming students (by gender, by grades/qualifications in baccalaureate/degrees, by grades in bachelor's degrees in the case of master's degrees, by grades in entrance exams, etc.)
- > 15. Percentage of students who study and work
- > 16. Percentage of students of foreign origin

### Dimension 4. Teaching staff

**The centre ensures that it has a sufficient number of competent, suitable teaching staff and applies sustainable, fair and transparent processes for their recruitment and personal and professional development.**

- > The academic credentials of the teaching staff are adequate to teach the qualifications offered by the centre.
- > The teaching staff have the necessary accreditation established by regulations.
- > The number of teaching staff at the centre is sufficient to provide the courses offered.
- > The hiring of new teachers is consistent with the established profile for teaching staff and the characteristics of the courses.
- > Selection processes are fair, reliable, ensure non-discrimination, and avoid conflicts of interest.
- > The training needs of teachers are assessed and the activities scheduled are easily accessible.

The centre's teaching staff must comply with the requirements established by Royal Decree 640/2021 in article 7, sections 4 to 8. In particular:

- > Have at least 1 full-time equivalent teacher for every 25 students. If the teaching modality is non-face-to-face, this may be as high as 1 per 50 students and, exceptionally, 1 per 100 students.
- > For bachelor's and master's degrees or equivalent, 50% of the teaching staff, calculated as full-time equivalent, must hold a doctorate in fields related to the disciplines of these degrees.
- > For doctoral degrees, 100% of the teaching staff, counted as full-time equivalent, must hold a doctorate in one of the disciplines of these degrees.

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- > Non-doctoral teaching staff shall have at least a qualification equivalent to level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework <sup>7</sup> (bachelor's degrees and equivalent).

The suitability of current teaching staff will be assessed in relation to their knowledge, teaching ability and qualifications, taking into account the degree programme and courses they teach. The percentage of doctoral and accredited doctoral teaching staff on the centre's degree programmes and that this is in line with regulations will be checked.

If the centre offers degree programmes or courses as blended, distance or dual training, it must demonstrate that its teaching staff are sufficiently competent pedagogically in these modes, as well as in the use of technologies for online teaching.

The centre must demonstrate that teaching staff numbers and their hours are sufficient to ensure the normal implementation of the centre's academic courses and that the teaching staff/student ratio is adequate and meets stipulated requirements.

Teaching staff selection processes must be fair, reliable and ensure non-discrimination on the grounds of birth, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance.

It will be assessed whether teachers have sufficient knowledge of contemporary developments in the discipline or field they teach and skills in up-to-date teaching methods appropriate to their subjects and courses.

The centre must demonstrate that its teaching staff have access to training for their continuing professional development, either general or discipline-specific. The adequacy of training activities will be assessed in terms of the type and discipline of the degree programmes offered by the centre and the number of people trained each year.

Opportunities to improve staff's teaching should be based, among other things, on student feedback, and staff must therefore have full access to this information.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E25. Centre's academic personnel structure and staffing (including contractual, salary and schedule (full/part time) levels)
- > E26. Course plan for the degree programmes and teaching staff assigned (field of knowledge, category, doctorate, accreditation, teaching and research merits, and schedule/number of hours must be specified)
- > E27. Related processes and procedures (teacher selection, recruitment and management, teacher training)

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<sup>7</sup> Council of the European Union, "[Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning \(Text with EEA relevance\)](#)", Pub. L. No. 2008/C 111/01, § I Resolutions, Recommendations and Opinions, C 111/01 OJ 1 (2008).

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- > E28. Detection of teaching staff requirements
- > E29. Assessment of the training plan (which must include the list of training activities in which the centre's teaching staff have participated)

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**, all broken down by gender and grouped by bachelor's and master's degrees:

- > I7. Percentage of credits taught by doctoral teaching staff on all degree programmes
- > I8. Percentage of credits taught by non-doctoral teaching staff on all degree programmes
- > I9. Percentage of credits taught by tenured teaching staff on all degree programmes
- > I10. Percentage of credits for the supervision of bachelor's/master's final projects or similar taught by doctoral teaching staff
- > I11. Ratio of full-time equivalent students (FTES) to full-time equivalent teaching staff (FTETS)

### Dimension 5. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

**The centre should ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.**

- > Teaching methods and activities are satisfactorily aligned with learning outcomes.
- > The teaching-learning process respects and caters for students' diversity and needs, allowing for flexible learning paths, fostering their autonomy and promoting mutual respect in the teacher-student relationship.
- > The assessment systems and criteria are varied, innovative and pertinent to certifying and distinguishing learning outcomes.
- > Bachelor's/master's final projects or similar and external work placements are supervised and assessed according to relevant and appropriate criteria.

The teaching methodology and training activities the centre has implemented in its subjects and courses will be checked to ensure they are appropriate for students to acquire the expected learning outcomes. Students must be informed of the methodology and training activities prior to enrolment.

How the effectiveness of methodologies and training activities is analysed and, if necessary, revised and improved will be assessed.

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The centre must have a policy, process or procedures for the assessment of student learning outcomes. These outcomes should be public and accessible to all the centre's stakeholders and ensure the integrity and security of the process. Implementation of the necessary mechanisms to ensure the identity of the student, especially in online assessment tests and detect plagiarism and copying will be assessed.

The assessment methods implemented will be checked to ensure they are suitable and relevant to demonstrating students' acquisition of all expected learning outcomes and whether they satisfactorily meet the characteristics of the degree disciplines. Assessment methods must also ensure that the marks awarded to students reflect their level of achievement. Students must be informed of the results of the assessment activities, provided with an adequate analysis of the level they have acquired to enable them to improve and guaranteed a review of the results.

The centre should show that its assessment practices make provisions for learners' specific needs, such as disability and other special educational needs, and are adequately adapted.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E16. Educational model of the centre or university
- > E18. Subject or course teaching guides (which must contain the learning outcomes, assessment systems and criteria, teaching methodology and activities, and learning resources)
- > E32. Student assessment tasks (representative of the type of subjects and grades)

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**:

- > I12. Student satisfaction
- > I13. Teacher satisfaction
- > I14. Percentage of bachelor's/master's degree final projects or similar linked to the lines of research at the centre
- > I15. Percentage of final or similar projects graded as excellent by the supervisor
- > I16. Percentage of external placements graded as excellent by the supervisor

## Dimension 6. Learning resources and student support

**The centre has guidance services and adequate and effective resources for student learning.**

- > The material resources available are appropriate to the number of students, the characteristics of the course and the educational model of the centre.



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- > Teaching and learning support infrastructures respond appropriately to students' learning needs.
- > The academic guidance services provide adequate support for the learning process, and the professional guidance services facilitate entry into the labour market and/or professional development.

The centre must ensure that the facilities and other educational infrastructures are sufficient, relevant, up-to-date and accessible to all students for all degree programmes. They must allow for smooth interaction between students and teachers and must be fully accessible to students with disabilities. The facilities and rest of the educational infrastructure should be designed to avoid bias based on gender, race, origin or any other personal or social condition or circumstance. This applies to all teaching formats. In this regard, it will be assessed that the technological infrastructure is dimensioned to support the entire student body and that it is permanently accessible.

The assessment of learning resources and support services will take into account three main aspects: quality, adequacy and access. These resources must be coherent with students' training needs and must be sufficient for and coherent with the discipline of the degrees, subjects and teaching methodology. The centre will ensure access to all recommended teaching materials in the degree subjects and/or course, either in physical form or online.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of academic and employability guidance will be assessed. The centre must ensure equal access to all support and guidance services and respect the students' diversity.

Staff and students should be clearly informed that the centre takes a zero-tolerance approach to sexual assault and harassment, whether on the basis of race, sexual orientation or any other circumstance. In this regard, the centre is expected to have plans in place to prevent such occurrences and to act responsibly and proactively to create an environment of well-being and safety for all students.

Information on guidance and other student support and counselling services should be public and accessible to the whole educational community.

The centre will be assessed on whether it gathers the opinions of teachers, students and administrative and service staff and takes them into account for the review and improvement of processes associated with the learning resources and support services.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E31. Related processes and/or procedures (management of educational facilities and infrastructure, student support and guidance)
- > E32. Educational facilities and infrastructure
- > E33. Detection of needs regarding facilities and infrastructure

- > E34. Contingency plan(s)
- > E35. Tutorial action plan(s) (TAP)
- > E36. List of student support and guidance services
- > E37. Specific and unique resources related to the disciplines of the centre's degree courses

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**:

- > I17. Percentage of students who attend tutoring sessions
- > I12. Student satisfaction
- > I13. Teacher satisfaction

### Dimension 7. Implementation of academic quality and results management systems

**The centre has a quality management system in place which includes processes for collecting information for the analysis and improvement of its training activities and the system itself. The results of the training programmes are adequate both with regard to the achievement of the learning outcomes and the indicators of academic performance, satisfaction and employment outcomes.**

- > The processes and/or procedures are in place and are continuously reviewed and improved.
- > The processes are adequate and efficient and allow proper monitoring and improvement of activities.
- > Students attain the intended learning outcomes.
- > The academic results, satisfaction and employment outcomes of the training programmes are adequate and consistent with those obtained by students at the university awarding the degree and in similar degrees in the same discipline.

The centre's activity related to the teaching-learning process is expected to be proceduralised. The processes and/or procedures put in place must be effective and must allow for the continuous improvement of the training programmes offered.

The collection and processing of information on the centre's academic activities shall be checked. The data and indicators collected must be relevant for assessing implementation of training programmes.

With regard to learning outcomes, the centre must demonstrate that graduates have achieved the learning outcomes initially envisaged in each of its degrees.

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The centre must collect and constantly update a set of indicators and academic data on student performance, satisfaction and employability. Regular analysis of academic results is essential for the continuous improvement of training programmes and other academic activities carried out by the centre. It is expected that the opinion of enrolled students, graduates and teaching staff on all relevant aspects of university education will be collected on a regular basis. This information should be processed and analysed in a similar way to other indicators and academic data.

The centre should have an improvement plan. It will be assessed that it is properly formalised and evidence-based, and that its deployment is regularly monitored. The actions envisaged should be appropriate for the improvement of the training programmes.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E38. Processes and procedures of the quality assurance system
- > E6. Improvement plan(s)
- > E5. Dashboard or similar
- > E30. Student assessment tasks (compulsory subjects, external placements and final bachelor's/master's projects)
- > E39. Centre and degree programme monitoring reports or similar reports

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**:

- > I18. Drop-out rate
- > I19. Graduation rate
- > I20. Student progress rate
- > I21. Degree programme efficiency rate
- > I22. Employment rate
- > I23. Study programme/work match rate
- > I24. Graduate satisfaction

## Dimension 8. Public information

**The centre adequately informs all stakeholders of the characteristics of the training programmes and the management processes that guarantee their quality.**

- > The centre publishes truthful, complete, up-to-date and accessible information on the characteristics of degree programmes and their delivery.

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- > The centre publishes information on the academic results and satisfaction of students and teaching staff, as well as the results of the review/accreditation of its degrees.

Due to the specificity of the entity assessed, the user will require more context and information on different elements that, for example, depend on foreign regulations or information located in repositories that are difficult to access.

Public reports by centres on the aspects of the implementation of its training programmes that are most relevant for enrolled and potential students will be considered an advantage. It will be verified that this information is accessible to all stakeholders (students, teaching staff, families and society in general) and is adapted to the different profiles.

AQU Catalunya will assess how up-to-date this information is and its structure, aggregation and accuracy. It is mandatory for the public information to be gender-sensitive and free of bias based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, origin or any other personal or social circumstance.

The centre will demonstrate that all information provided on its website is accessible to people with disabilities and special educational needs and follows good practices in this regard.

The Agency expects at least the following information to be available on the centre's website for each degree:

- > Terms of access, admission criteria, credit/enrolment fee and other costs related to enrolment.
- > Academic regulations and the procedures and channels for claims, complaints or suggestions.
- > The structure of the curriculum and the teaching guides for each of its subjects/courses, with information on the credits or volume of learning, expected learning outcomes, contents, time frame, teaching methodologies and activities, bibliographic resources, and assessment activities and criteria.
- > The profiles of the teachers on the centre's degree programmes, so that students can make an informed choice of subjects and courses, if necessary. The minimum information required is a brief CV of the professor with the most relevant aspects of their teaching and research career and contact details.
- > The centre's academic results, student and teacher satisfaction, employment outcomes and institutional accreditation results. If available, the centre is expected to publish the results for the last six years.
- > Information on student and teaching staff mobility, learning resources and student guidance and support services.

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- > The assessment reports for the centre and/or the degrees taught.
- > The management system processes and procedures and their results.

The following **evidence** may be used by the centre to help demonstrate these standards:

- > E38. Quality assurance system processes and procedures (public information)
- > E40. Website and other public information
- > E41. Public information accessibility audit

The evidence may be accompanied by the following **indicators**:

- > I12. Student satisfaction
- > I13. Teacher satisfaction

## ANNEX 1. EVIDENCE AND INDICATORS

Evidence	Dimension							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
E1. Affiliation agreement and monitoring documents								
E2. Centre organisation chart								
E3. Regulations of the centre's governing bodies and commissions								
E4. Strategic plan or similar								
E5. Dashboard or similar								
E6. Improvement plan(s)								
E7. Documentation showing the economic viability of the centre								
E8. Map of the centre's degree courses								
E9. Accreditation of the implementation of degrees taught at the university of origin								
E10. Other specific reports analysing the current training offer and possible future changes								
E11. Entry and admission criteria for students								
E12. Human resources policy								
E13. Distance learning policy								
E14. Gender Equality Plan and its results								
E15. Sexual, gender and sexual orientation harassment prevention protocol								
E16. Other regulations related to the teaching-learning process								
E17. Authorisation and/or accreditation reports for the awarding university								
E18. Teaching guides								
E19. Written commitment to continuity								

## Guide to the Assessment of Foreign Centres

Evidence	Dimension							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
E20. Processes and procedures related to admission, progress and certification								
E21. Regulations and criteria for credit recognition								
E22. Rules for permanence								
E23. Transition and reception plan for new student entrants								
E24. Profile of new students								
E25. Centre's academic personnel structure and staffing								
E26. Course plan for the degree programmes and teaching staff assigned to them								
E27. Processes and procedures related to teacher selection and management								
E28. Detection of teaching staff requirements								
E29. Assessment of the training plan								
E30. Student assessment tasks								
E31. Processes and procedures related to educational and support infrastructure								
E32. Educational facilities and infrastructure								
E33. Detection of needs regarding facilities and infrastructure								
E34. Contingency plan(s)								
E35. Tutorial action plan(s) (TAP)								
E36. List of student support and guidance services								
E37. Specific and unique resources related to the degree disciplines								
E38. Processes and procedures of the quality assurance system								
E39. Centre and degree programme monitoring reports or similar reports								
E40. Website and other public information								
E41. Public information accessibility audit								
E42. Protocol completed by the awarding university								

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Indicator	Dimension							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I1. Ratio of demand/places offered								
I2. Ratio of students enrolled/places offered								
I3. Percentage of students who have taken and passed Spanish entrance exams								
I4. Profile of new students								
I5. Percentage of students who study and work								
I6. Percentage of students of foreign origin								
I7. Percentage of credits taught by doctoral teaching staff								
I8. Percentage of credits taught by non-doctoral teaching staff								
I9. Percentage of credits taught by tenured teaching staff								
I10. Percentage of credits for bachelor's/master's degree final projects supervised by doctoral teaching staff								
I11. Full-time equivalent students and full-time equivalent teaching staff								
I12. Student satisfaction								
I13. Teacher satisfaction								
I14. Percentage of final projects linked to lines of research at the centre								
I15. Percentage of top grades in the supervision of final projects								
I16. Percentage of top grades in the supervision of external placements								
I17. Percentage of students who attend tutoring sessions								
I18. Drop-out rate								
I19. Graduation rate								
I20. Student progress rate								
I21. Degree programme efficiency rate								
I22. Employment rate								
I23. Study programme/work match rate								
I24. Graduate satisfaction								



## ANNEX 2. PROTOCOL FOR THE UNIVERSITY AWARDING THE DEGREE

Together with this documentation and prior to an external review of the quality of the educational services, the short questionnaire below is to be completed by the awarding HE institution. Short, specific answers would be appreciated.

The questionnaire should be signed by:

- a) The highest-level academic coordinator/manager at the degree-awarding HE institution.
- b) The academic coordinator/manager at the degree-awarding HE who will monitor the quality of the study programme being delivered in Catalonia.

### Programme identification

Name of the programme in Catalonia	
Name of the degree awarded: a) Duration of the programme in terms/ECTS b) Anticipated student numbers for the programme in Catalonia for a period of (e.g. 5) years c) To what extent is use made of the Diploma Supplement?	
Name of the providing institution in Catalonia	
Name of the degree-awarding HE institution	
If applicable: Position of the qualification in the National Qualification Framework of the home country	

## Guide to the Assessment of Foreign Centres

### Part 1: Experience and academic potential of the awarding institution in the field of the study programme

#### *Basic facts of the awarding HE institution*

- a) Status of the university (public / private)
- b) Total numbers of degrees offered (BA, MA, PhD)
- c) Total numbers of students in each type of degree (BA, MA, PhD)
- d) Total number of Bachelor students in the last academic year
- e) Total number of teachers on Bachelor degree programmes in the last academic year
- f) If possible, the total number of foreign students in BA, MA and PhD programmes:

#### *Teaching activities at the awarding HE institution related to the study programme provided in Catalonia*

- a) Taking into account the syllabus that is to be offered in Catalonia, state that your institution delivers an identical syllabus and awards an identical degree at the home campus. Provide the syllabus and the name and CV of the academic coordinator/s (Use an appendix for this).
- b) Number of students taking the identical study programme and/or similar ones in the last three (3) academic years at the awarding institution.
- c) How long has/have the programme/s been running and how many students have been awarded the degree?

#### *Networking within the scope of the programme*

- a) Have any agreements to deliver the same or similar programmes been signed between your institution and other foreign universities? If so, please give details and answer questions b and c; if not, go on to part 2.
- b) To what extent do students who are registered in programmes awarded by your institution but delivered by other institutions have access to student services at your institution? (e.g. remote access to the library, graduates' register, alumni associations, etc.).
- c) Do the general admission requirements at your institution also apply to foreign students? If not, what are the admission requirements for the foreign students?

### Part 2: Internal quality assurance

- a) Student admission requirements: Mechanisms to ensure that student requirements and procedures at the home campus and at the new site of the providing institution in Catalonia are the same.
- b) Student assessment: Mechanisms to ensure that the intended learning outcomes achieved by students in study programmes delivered abroad are comparable to those achieved by students on the study programme (or similar study programmes) at the home campus.
- c) Mechanisms to ensure that the learning outcomes of the study programme delivered abroad are achieved.
- d) Provide evidence of the coordination of all processes regarding teaching and research between the home campus and the new site.
- e) Does your website provide public information about the programme delivered in Catalonia?

### Part 3: External quality assurance

- a) External review of the quality of the programme at your institution.
- b) The corresponding body that carries out and publishes the results of the external review.
- c) The external review of quality in your institution.
- d) The corresponding body that carries out and publishes the results of the external review.
- e) Provide evidence of these processes (e.g. public reports in the case of the external review of the study programme and/or institution).
- f) Programme and/or institutional accreditation.
- g) Provide evidence of the relevant accreditation process.
- h) The legal entitlement of your institution to offer this programme abroad. Are the degrees awarded for the programme offered in Catalonia given automatic recognition in the home country or does national legislation in the home country call for a specific procedure for this? If this is the case, please provide evidence.

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

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