



**AQU CATALUNYA**

# **2023–2026 Strategic Plan**



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# Background



## 2001

In 2001 AQU Catalunya published the **Action Plan for quality enhancement in the Catalan university system<sup>1</sup>**, covering the period up to 2007. This was soon surpassed as the activities themselves were implemented. This document was arguably the Agency's first approach to developing a strategic plan.



<sup>1</sup> It included institutions offering higher arts education equivalent to a bachelor's degree.

## 2009 – 2012

**The first actual plan, the 2009–2012 Strategic Plan**, laid the foundations for AQU Catalunya’s strategic priorities and was drawn up through an internal and external participatory process. Most of its strategic and operational goals were reasonably and efficiently achieved, while a few remained unmet due to the changing context.



## 2015 – 2018

The 2015–2018 Strategic Plan was also produced through a participatory process, based on previous experience, fulfilment of the previous strategic plan and an analysis of detected strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This plan set out AQU Catalunya's **six strategic areas of action**, which are **still applicable for the annual Action Plan**:

I	Institutional assessment	IV	Internationalisation
II	Teaching staff assessment	V	Strategic management
III	Knowledge generation and transfer	VI	Internal organisation

A total of **17 strategic and 39 operational goals** were defined, which were then specified as activities.



That strategic plan, although worded simply and precisely, encompassed a number of important ideas for enhancing the quality of the university system in Catalonia, as well as the Agency itself.

These included a greater emphasis:

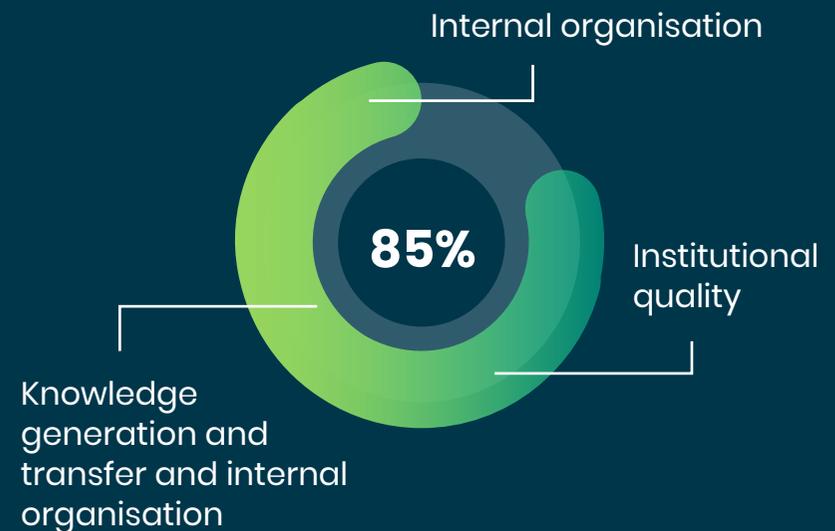
- ✓ On institutional assessment rather than the assessment of training programmes.
- ✓ Seeking to improve teaching staff assessment to make it more useful and efficient as an instrument for teaching staff policies.
- ✓ Strengthening knowledge generation and transfer to create added value in the Catalan university system for decision-making.
- ✓ The willingness to support Catalan universities in their internationalisation policies.

## 2015 – 2018



All this alongside maintaining the Agency's international prestige and recognition, improving satisfaction for all stakeholders (universities, staff and students) and, of course, having competent, flexible and efficient staff.

The level of achievement of the 2015–2018 strategic plan was **85%**. Most progress was made in the strategic priorities of institutional quality, knowledge generation and transfer and internal organisation, while least progress was made in internationalisation.



## 2019 – 2022

For the 2019–2022 Strategic Plan, AQU Catalunya set out a plan that was simpler to manage, with fewer strategic goals but aimed at producing greater impact.

The general aim was to ensure sufficient resources were provided to achieve the set goals and ensure understanding between the Ministry of Research and Universities and the Catalan university system. As in the implementation of the previous strategic plan, strategic lines and goals were specified in actions that identified the party responsible, the timetable for implementation, the goals to be achieved and the measurement indicators to monitor and assess fulfilment.

Overall achievement of the 2019–2022 Strategic Plan was somewhat lower (76%) than in previous years because some of the activities could not be carried out (visits to other agencies) or were postponed (integrating seals of excellence and additional dimensions into institutional accreditation, etc.) due to the pandemic.

2019–2022  
Strategic Plan



The actions set out in the strategy for strengthening the international position and that of the Catalan university system were fully implemented and activities relating to facilitating access to quantitative and qualitative data, in an integrated manner, to improve the quality of the Catalan university system and to develop actions with innovative elements that have an impact on the Catalan university system have been substantially implemented.

## Presentation of the Strategic Plan 2023–2026



The preparation of the Strategic Plan 2023–2026 is based on previous experience with the earlier plans, and a SWOT analysis based on the opinions of the heads of the universities, external experts and Agency staff, gathered in surveys.

The Agency director, department heads and coordinators have identified the strengths to maintain, the weaknesses to correct, the opportunities to exploit and the threats to face.

## SWOT analysis

Strengths



Maintain

Weaknesses



Correct

Opportunities



Exploit

Threats

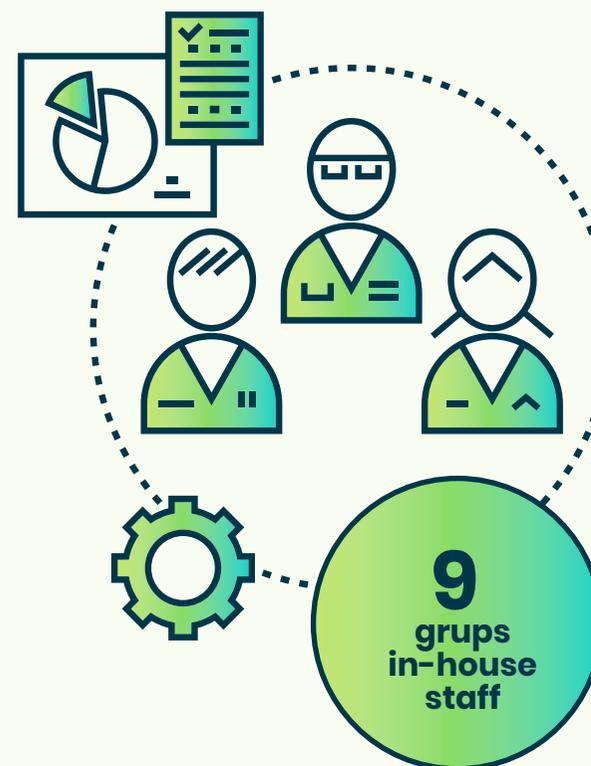


Face

The strategic goals and actions in the Strategic Plan 2023–2026 were defined by setting up **nine working groups of in-house staff**, which held in-depth discussions on different aspects highlighted by the SWOT analysis from October and December 2022.

At the same time, this document contains the preliminary reflections from the AQU Catalunya Advisory Commission, which were gathered at the meeting on 1 December 2022.

**The results** of this work were submitted to internal consultation between December 2022 and January 2023, and external consultation by stakeholders in January and February 2023.



The 2023–2026 Strategic Plan we present here incorporates the purpose and maintains the vision, mission and values of AQU Catalunya. It groups the strategic goals and actions into the following **corporate social responsibility** commitments, which structure the instruments for managing AQU Catalunya's activities:

It also maintains the premise of prioritising strategic goals and actions that have a greater potential impact within the Catalan university system and which are achievable and reinforce internal efficiency.



**Commitment to improving higher education**



**Commitment to good governance**



**Commitment to society**



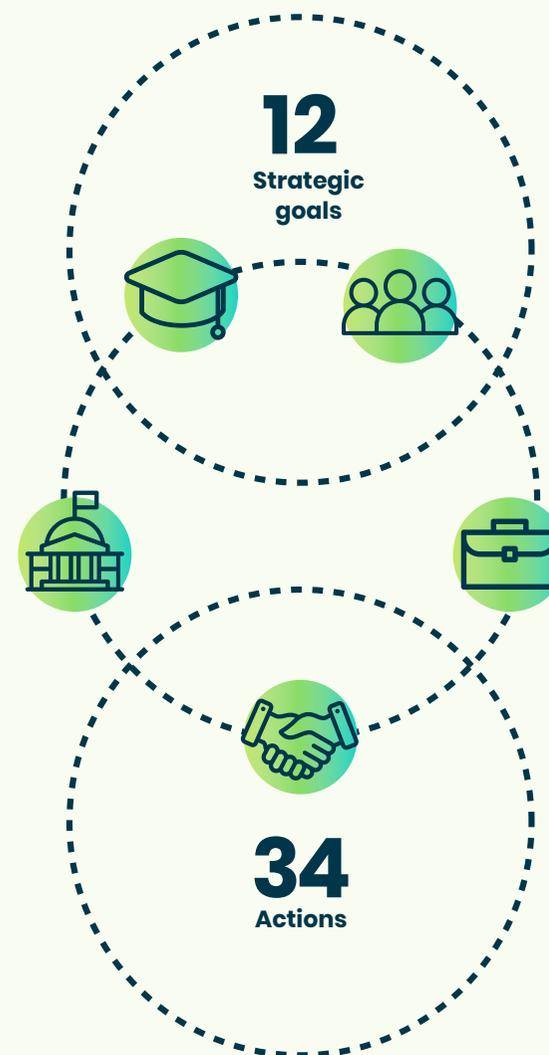
**Commitment to partnerships**



**Commitment to employees**

In total, **12 strategic goals and 34 actions in the five corporate social responsibility commitments have been identified for implementation by December 2026.**

The aim of this new strategic plan is to consolidate, **improve the efficiency of and reduce the timescales for the assessment procedures AQU Catalunya** currently manages, while also **designing and implementing new value-added activities** for the Catalan university system, some of which are in line with the new responsibilities placed on the Agency.



The plan was drawn up after the passing of **Law 9/2022, of 21 December**, on science in Catalonia. This law states that AQU Catalunya must also assume **responsibility for the approval, announcement, organisation and management of external assessment or review procedures to accredit departments**, research institutes and affiliated centres conducting research, development and innovation activities, that participate in the University Strategic Plan for Research Excellence. It must also **adopt an equality** plan that includes measures regarding the internal organisation of the Agency and its assessment procedures.

Fulfilling this responsibility will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the implementation and execution of this strategic plan. Work on the issue was already underway at the time of its adoption. Monitoring the implementation of the 2023–2026 Strategic Plan (as explained in section "Implementation and follow-up of the Strategic Plan") will need to pay particularly close attention to this issue so that necessary revisions can be made to ensure AQU Catalunya's obligations stipulated in the Science Act are implemented as appropriately and efficiently as possible.



**Purpose,  
vision, mission  
and values**





Purpose



Vision



Mission



Values



Purpose

To help improve the quality of the Catalan university system.





## Vision

AQU Catalunya is an independent actor in the Catalan university system that provides support for higher education institutions to assure the quality of the study programmes, teaching staff and centres for which the institutions themselves are ultimately responsible.

It works to be an **instrument for generating knowledge, with an international presence to help enhance higher education institutions in a global context.**



## Mission

AQU Catalunya is an internationally recognised public institution whose mission is to ensure the quality of higher education in Catalonia, meeting international quality, academic and social standards, and to safeguard society's interests in quality higher education.

### Its activity is carried out through:

- The defence of democratic and progressive values in higher education.
- The involvement of all social actors in service to the community.
- The work of people who are competent, motivated and satisfied with the work they do.
- Analysis, assessment, certification, auditing and accreditation procedures.
- International benchmarks and a clear focus on innovation.
- The promotion of transparency and public availability in both the university system and the actions themselves.



## Values

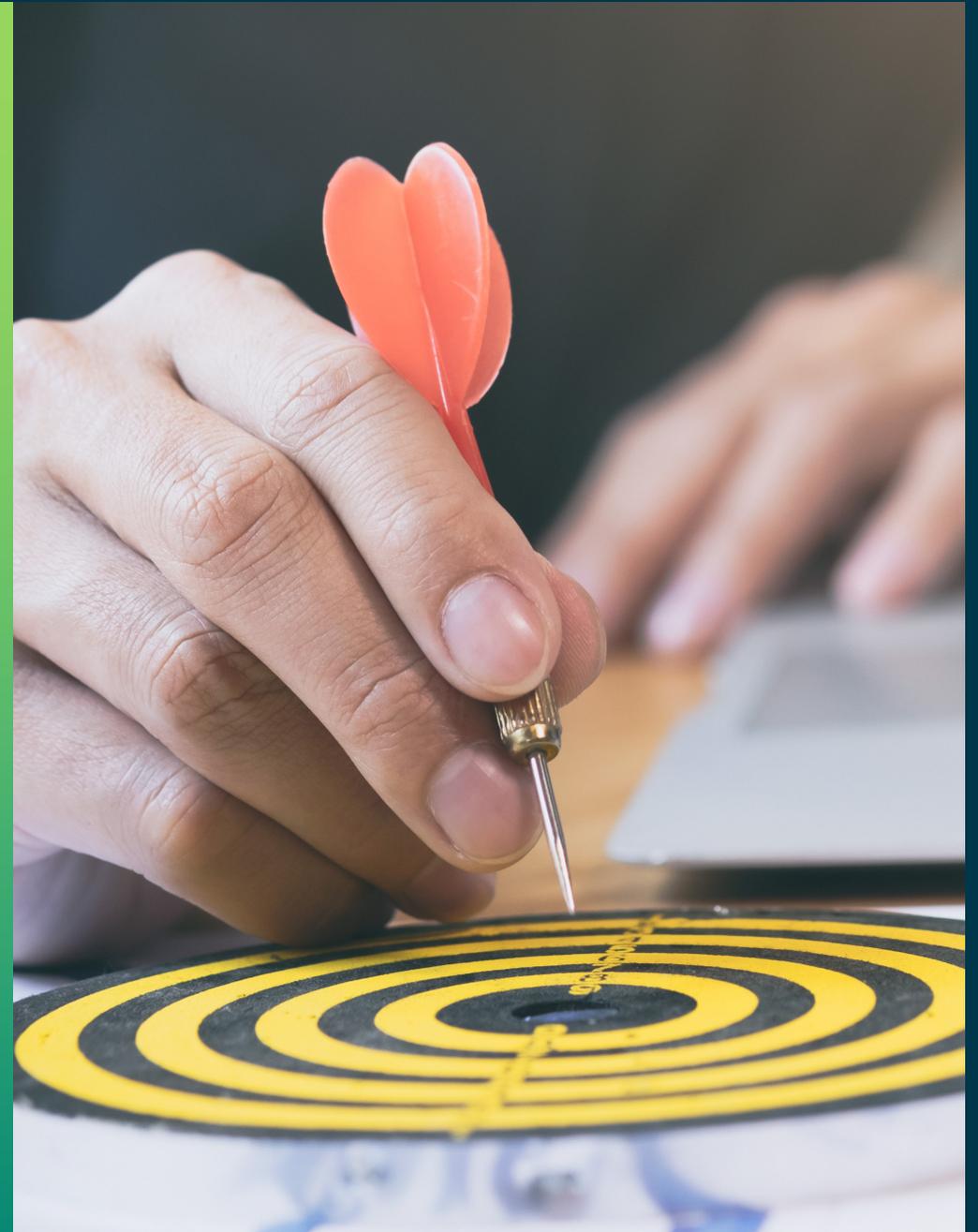
The values are defined in the AQU Catalunya Code of Ethics (2019), which classifies them as:

- **Fundamental:**  
dignity, independence, impartiality, integrity, innovation and continuous improvement, public service, diversity, equity and trust.
- **Instrumental:**  
transparency and accountability, cooperation, efficiency, internationalisation and competence.

Furthermore, as part of Catalonia's knowledge system, the Agency endorses the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, working particularly towards **sustainability, gender equality and the fight against social inequality**.

## Strategic commitments and goals

AQU Catalunya's strategic lines in this edition of the Plan will match and reinforce the Agency's corporate social responsibility commitments.



## 1. Commitment to improving higher education

### **Goal 1.1:**

Consolidate institutional accreditation as the benchmark methodology in the Catalan university system.

### **Action 1.1.1:**

Design and implement excellence recognition processes as part of institutional accreditation.

### **Action 1.1.2:**

Implement institutional accreditation processes adapted to quality risks in each centre and the teaching format (face-to-face, hybrid or online).

### **Action 1.1.3:**

Strengthen the active involvement and effective participation of stakeholders, especially the student body, in institutional accreditation processes.

## 1. Commitment to improving higher education

### **Goal 1.2:**

Develop a framework for assessing departments, research institutes and affiliated research centres to obtain the credential of excellence provided for in Science Act of Catalonia.

### **Action 1.2.1:**

Design and implement excellence recognition procedures in external reviews to obtain credentials for departments, research institutes and affiliated research centres.

## 1. Commitment to improving higher education

### **Goal 1.3:**

Promote analysis and reflection on new trends in higher education and generate knowledge for the Catalan university system.

### **Action 1.3.1:**

Identify new trends in higher education and set up spaces for reflection and debate to share knowledge with the Catalan university system.

### **Action 1.3.2:**

Define external quality assurance in lifelong learning provided by the Catalan university system.

### **Action 1.3.3:**

Within the quality assessment framework, create instruments to identify and take into account the teaching innovation initiatives being developed in the Catalan university system.

## 1. Commitment to improving higher education

### **Goal 1.4:**

Promote analysis and reflection on teaching staff assessment to incorporate the requirements arising from new legislation frameworks and trends and to generate knowledge.

### **Action 1.4.1:**

Establish a positioning strategy for the multidimensional assessment of teachers' activity in terms of open science, in coordination with the Open Science Strategy of Catalonia.

### **Action 1.4.2:**

Generate knowledge on teaching staff quality based on the accreditation results to meet the needs of the university system, especially with regard to issues of gender equality and consolidating teaching staff academic careers.

### **Action 1.4.3:**

Contribute to improving the teaching assessment model in conjunction with stakeholders.

### **Action 1.4.4:**

Identify scientific information needs (bibliometrics and other databases, e.g. projects and theses) for future research assessment of individuals and institutions, departments, etc., in coordination with the Catalan Open Science Strategy.

### **Action 1.4.5:**

Establish the procedure and criteria for assessing the teaching staff transfer premium, in the directives laid down by the Catalan Government.

## 1. Commitment to improving higher education

### **Goal 1.5:**

Ensure an efficient system, to supplement existing ones, for the collection, processing and dissemination of university quality data, which will facilitate the development of a business intelligence system to serve as a benchmark for decision-making in the Catalan university system.

### **Action 1.5.1:**

Automate the collection, validation and uploading of data required for the maintenance of AQU Catalunya data.

### **Action 1.5.2:**

Explore the potential of Machine Learning to complement assessment procedures and improve their efficiency, taking into consideration ethical foundations and applying criteria of transparency and minimising bias.

### **Action 1.5.3:**

Develop scorecards to make external assessment procedures more efficient.

## 2. Commitment to society

### **Goal 2.1:**

Strengthen knowledge transfer to increase the impact of AQU Catalunya activities and society's trust in the quality of the Catalan university system.

### **Action 2.1.1:**

Define impact indicators for external assessment procedures and monitor and disseminate the results.

### **Action 2.1.2:**

Complete the EUC portal with the lifelong learning programmes assessed by the Agency and ensure the reliability of the data.

### **Action 2.1.3:**

Increase the visibility of AQU Catalunya activities in communication channels and on social media.

## 2. Commitment to society

### **Goal 2.2:**

Within the Agency's activities, contribute to implementing the Plan to strengthen the Catalan language in the Catalan university and research system.

### **Action 2.2.1:**

Analyse incorporating the “relevance/impact” of scientific publications in Catalan into the concept of “quality” in the existing criteria for teaching staff accreditation.

### **Action 2.2.2:**

Study the incorporation of “relevance/impact” elements associated with activities carried out in Catalan in the future knowledge and technology transfer six-year period.

### **Action 2.2.3:**

Strengthen the presence of Catalan in degree programme and institution assessment procedures coordinated by AQU Catalunya.

### **Action 2.2.4:**

Formalise the criteria for the treatment and consideration of Catalan in external visits in assessment procedures.

### 3. Commitment to good governance

**Goal 3.1:**

Improve the efficiency of degree programme and institution assessment procedure involving external visits.

**Action 3.1.1:**

Analyse and adapt processes involving external visits and their management platforms, while simplifying the paperwork.

### 3. Commitment to good governance

**Goal 3.2:**

Increase the efficiency and flexibility of teaching staff accreditation procedures, reducing assessment times and simplifying processing, in order to meet the needs of the Catalan university system.

**Action 3.2.1:**

Transform calls for teaching staff accreditation into open calls throughout the year.

**Action 3.2.2:**

Automate the uploading of CV documentation in teaching staff accreditation processes.

**Action 3.2.3:**

Improve the mechanism for assigning assessors to applicants' scientific profiles, to improve the strength of assessments.

### 3. Commitment to good governance

**Goal 3.3:**

Strengthen experts' continuous training with a training plan and appropriate tools.

**Action 3.3.1:**

Design a training plan for experts in line with the different needs of AQU Catalunya's assessment and accreditation procedures.

**Action 3.3.2:**

Develop tools and support to accompany the training plan for experts.

## 4. Commitment to partnerships

### **Goal 4.1:**

Contribute to the international promotion of the Catalan university system while strengthening AQU Catalunya's international position in the field of degree programme assessment.

### **Action 4.1.1:**

Establish the European Approach as the benchmark methodology in international joint degree programmes coordinated by universities in the Catalan university system.

### **Action 4.1.2:**

Promote the assessment of degree programmes at centres and universities outside Spain, using AQU Catalunya's existing degree programme accreditation methodologies.

### **Action 4.1.3:**

Draw up a code of good practice for Catalan universities offering courses outside the European Higher Education Area.

## 5. Commitment to the workplace

### **Goal 5.1:**

Strengthen the management and consolidation of knowledge transfer and organisational culture to prepare the Agency for future changes in the national and international environment.

### **Action 5.1.1:**

Rethink and implement the AQU Catalunya staff training and development plan in order to strengthen the management and consolidation of knowledge transfer.

### **Action 5.1.2:**

Design and implement a structured system to transmit and develop the organisation's culture.

### **Action 5.1.3:**

Implement an equality plan including measures relating to the internal organisation of the Agency.

## Implementation and follow-up of the Strategic Plan



Once approved by the Governing Board, the Strategic Plan 2023–2026 will be published on the AQU Catalunya website for transparency and presented to Agency staff.

It will then be set out in a table, identifying the actions, goals, indicators, responsible parties and timetable for implementation.

The actions in the strategic plan will be included in the annual business plan in line with the implementation schedule. Compliance with these activities will be reviewed every three months by the Internal Coordination Committee, made up of all AQU Catalunya managers.

Once a year, a specific session will be held to analyse how the Strategic Plan 2023–2026 is progressing. The results of these meetings will be shared with AQU Catalunya staff over existing communication channels. Once a year, when the annual activities are closed, the state of implementation of the Strategic Plan will also be presented to the Governing Board and as part of the AQU Catalunya meta-assessment report.

Follow the link for more information on the **operation of the internal quality assurance and information security system.**





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

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