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

GUIDE TO THE ACCREDITATION OF RECOGNISED PHD PROGRAMMES

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aims of the guide

In our setting, and on the context of the State's regulatory presence, it may be stated that accreditation can be viewed as an administrative procedure or action that responds to a legal mandate and which grants official recognition or legal status to academic credentials (qualifications) awarded to university students by institutions.

Nevertheless, beyond this the goal of accreditation is to **ensure – for the benefit of the user – that study programmes offered by universities meet the formal and administrative requirements enforced by the relevant authority, while guaranteeing that the “educational level” attained by graduates corresponds to the level certified by the institution.** To this end, in relation to the study programme implemented, the following areas should be reviewed:

- That it meets the legal requirements set by the relevant authority (qualification name, structure, entrance criteria and requirements, etc.).
- That in relation to the established skills profile the academic proposal meets the specifications of the MECES (Spanish Framework for Higher Education Qualification) according to the qualification level, and the extent to which the academic knowledge underpinning it is relevant and up-to-date.
- That it has been developed using suitable resources in terms of teaching staff, infrastructure, learning support services and material resources.
- That certificates awarded adhere to suitable, appropriate procedures to assess student achievement, clearly showcasing the level of quality demanded.
- That the academic pathways of progression and graduation, as well as employability, of PhD holders fall in line with the characteristics of the PhD students and the potential afforded by the labour context.
- That it benefits from internal assurance mechanisms guaranteeing regular analysis of the study process centred on the continual improvement of the education of its PhD students.

On the basis of the foregoing, this documents set out the procedures and criteria for accreditation determined by AQU Catalunya in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015), the primary goal of which is to ensure **equivalence between the study programme given and the European qualification level.**

To this end, AQU Catalunya's Governing Board approved the VSMA Framework (AQU, 2016), on the basis of which this accreditation guide, endorsed by AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee, was prepared. This guide pursues the following objectives:

- To ensure the quality of the study programmes offered in accordance with the qualification levels established and the criteria set out in current regulations.
- To assure availability of valid, reliable information to assist users of the university system in decision-making.
- To facilitate internal quality improvement processes in relation to the services and programmes developed by Catalan universities.
- To incorporate the validation process arising from the proposal for substantial amendments.

In order to achieve these aims, the accreditation model proposed in this guide makes the following presuppositions:

- **International equivalence.** As an acknowledged agency and a member of European quality assurance bodies (ENQA, EQAR), AQU Catalunya must adopt assessment guidelines and criteria in accordance with this status (in line with the ESGs, 2015).
- **Involvement of each institution in the assessment of evidence and the determination of improvement actions.** Internal validation or self-assessment is a key aspect of the procedure. The enhancement plan that supports and sets the timeframe of actions to be performed draws on verifiable qualitative and quantitative information that is generated by an internal quality assurance system.
- **Integration of accountability and continual improvement** as a means of incorporating internal and external requirements.
- Specific attention to **PhD students' academic achievements**, vital evidence as to the quality of the study programme.
- **Recognition of progress, best practices and outstanding quality** as an indication of the need to accept the principle that accreditation should foster continual improvement of study programmes.
- **Transparency and disclosure of processes and results, an essential goal to assuring credibility in decisions.** This also implies that institutions are guaranteed the right to defence in relation to final decisions in a process of statements.

1.2. Context and framework of reference

Royal Decree 99/2011, of 28 January, regulating recognised PhD study programmes, lays down a new regulatory framework implementing a new structure for PhD programmes while adopting the guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) along with the recommendations stemming from various European and international forums. They all have to do with the structure and organisation of the PhD programme, the skills that should be acquired, the conditions for admission and development of a research career in the initial stage, the essential role of supervision and tutoring of research training, the incorporation of this training in a research environment conducive to communication and creativity, internationalisation and mobility as essential aspects of this type of study programme, and the assessment and accreditation of quality as a benchmark for international recognition and appeal.

PhD programmes are subject to the same validation, monitoring and accreditation procedures as those applicable to recognised Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. They are determined in Royal Decree 1393/2007,¹ of 29 October, establishing the organisation of recognised university study programmes.

Accreditation of recognised study programmes by AQU Catalunya forms part of the **Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised study programmes** (VSMA framework),² approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board on 18 July 2016. This document strives to bring together the four procedures of assessment established by the legal framework – validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation – in a logical manner to assure the quality of recognised study programmes with the aim to provide conceptual coherence and greater efficiency in managing the various assessment procedures to be implemented.

The accreditation model is based on the **Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (ESG)**,³ developed by the ENQA and reviewed and approved by the ministers responsible for education in Yerevan in 2015.

¹ Amended by RD 861/2010, of 2 July; RD 99/2011, of 28 January; RD 534/2013, of 12 July; and RD 96/2014, of 14 February.

² VSMA framework: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_31479088_1.pdf

³ ESG: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_44505772_1.pdf

2. THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

2.1. Assessment committees

One aspect that helps to ensure the validity, reliability and usefulness of external assessment procedures is the action performed by external experts (peer reviews). Peer reviews are based on the academic, scientific and technical guidance afforded by experts as a distinguishing feature. They are also based on a direct study and observation of the reality to be assessed, which makes it possible to clarify the information examined and place it in context; therefore, it may be stated that the approach to accreditation is peer-based.

The required profile in order to be on the various committees is detailed in the *Directrius per al desenvolupament del Marc per a la verificació, el seguiment, la modificació i l'acreditació de titulacions oficials* (Guidelines for the development of the Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degree programmes and qualifications, AQU, 2010, in Catalan),⁴ approved by AQU Catalunya's Management Board in its meeting held on 2 December 2010.

The selection of experts is a procedure that AQU Catalunya keeps open on a permanent basis via a mechanism where experts may register with the Agency's expert panel through the website <https://extranet.aqu.cat/SeguretatUsuari/SignOn?idioma=ca-ES>. In addition, the website expert section (<http://www.aqu.cat/experts/index.html>) includes online training on quality, along with descriptions of the regulatory framework, the Bologna process and the Catalan university system.

2.1.1. External assessment committees (CAEs)

In all accreditation procedures it is necessary for an external team of auditors to visit the HEI, with the subsequent visit report playing a key role in the final decision made by the accreditation panels.

It is the responsibility of external assessment committees (CAEs, from the Catalan), the composition of which is designed taking into consideration the specific field of knowledge of the programmes to be accredited, to perform external assessments on a specific programme. AQU Catalunya presents the CAE composition to the institution to enable the latter to specify whether any conflict of interest applies to any of the committee's members. This is the only circumstance under which any changes may be made to committee members. Upon completion of the assessment

⁴ <http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_27365192_1.pdf>

and once the external assessment report has been issued, the CAE's functions are complete.

The standard composition of an external assessment committee (CAE) is as follows:

- The **chairperson**.⁵
- One **academic member**.⁵
- One **student**.
- One **secretary** who is a methodology specialist.

However, **the composition of the committees may vary according to the number and type of study programmes to be assessed by each committee**. For instance, committees shall include an individual with a research/professional profile where appropriate.

The outcome of these duties is an **external assessment report** that the CAE refers to the corresponding accreditation panel.

2.1.2. Specific assessment committees (CEA)

In the accreditation process, the specific assessment committees set up under the VSMA Framework (AQU, 2016) to be responsible for the validation, monitoring and modification of recognised programmes, take on the duties of an accreditation committee. This ensures that the know-how acquired throughout the assessment processes is maintained and serves to reinforce the coherence of decisions made within the context of accreditation. Their main function is to issue **accreditation reports** (IdA, from the Catalan) on programmes submitted for accreditation so that the corresponding bodies can make the definitive decision concerning accreditation.

In accordance with the resolution of the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee, the *specific committee for the assessment of recognised PhD programmes* shall be responsible for assessing the procedures that are part of the VSMA framework for these qualifications and, accordingly, it shall be responsible for their accreditation.

The profile of the members of the accreditation panels and the assessment and selection criteria are also described in *Directrius per al desenvolupament del Marc per a la verificació, el seguiment, la modificació i l'acreditació de titulacions oficials* (Guidelines for the development of the Framework for the verification, monitoring,

⁵ Both of whom should have a research profile.

modification and accreditation of recognised degree programmes and qualifications, AQU, 2010, in Catalan).

2.1.3. Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee is the committee in charge of deciding on the appeals which are lodged in PhD programmes accreditation processes. In the decision on appeals, the committee will have on hand reports from experts in the field or fields of the programmes which lodge the respective appeals, and such experts should preferably be from outside the Catalan university system.

2.2. The accreditation procedure

The main stages of the accreditation process are as follows:

- 1) **Selection of programmes for external assessment.** AQU Catalunya's Governing Board annually gives its approval to programmes selected for external assessment in the following academic year, according to the programmes due for accreditation. The proposal is drawn up jointly between the universities and AQU Catalunya.
- 2) **Planning of the site visit.** The dates for the site visit to analyse each programme or group of programmes are planned jointly by AQU Catalunya and the Catalan universities. The plan should be approved by either the end of the academic year prior to the one in which the visit is to be made or right at the beginning of the corresponding academic year.
- 3) **Submission of the accreditation application.** The institution should formally request the accreditation of its programmes in accordance with the criteria and the deadlines established by the Government of Catalonia's Resolution ECO/1902/2014, dated 31st July. In any case, the institution should request the accreditation of all the programmes which are assessed at the latest at the time of the external visit.
- 4) **Acceptance of the application.** Applications that comply with the prerequisites shall be accepted by the administrative authority. If this is not the case, the institution will be asked to make any relevant changes within ten working days. Once it has been accepted, the application is then referred to AQU Catalunya, which will decide on it in a maximum time of 9 months.
- 5) **Documentation to be submitted.** The HEI should deliver the following documents **three calendar months** (without counting the month of August or other holiday and/or vacation periods) before the external assessment committee's visit to the faculty.

- a. **The programme's self-assessment report.** The self-assessment report **integrates and replaces the final monitoring reports.** Even so, it will be necessary to incorporate a brief section providing an introduction to the programme and another offering a description and valuation of the process for preparing the self-assessment report. It should also contain an appropriately updated copy of the enhancement plan.
 - b. **Evidence.** The recommended evidence which is listed in this guide should be submitted at least (chapter 3).
 - c. **A sample of students' achievements.** It will be necessary to prepare a selection of evidence based on the PhD theses defended over the past six-year period of research activity (or sexennial). Where available, it is also advisable to include a sample of other written examinations, projects and/or reports.
- 6) **Analysis of the self-assessment report and of the evidence.** The purpose of this review, which in general is envisaged in all quality assessment procedures, is to identify the strengths and areas for improvement through the application of the standards given in this guide, and to establish the issues that need to be clarified prior to the site visit and the most important aspects to be dealt with during that visit. An assessment is made of the quality and relevance of both the evidence and the self-assessment report. On the basis of this, the president and the secretary of the external assessment committee have to decide if more or better information needs to be provided and assess whether it is appropriate for the external assessment to continue.
- 7) **Preliminary visit.** If it is deemed appropriate, **about six weeks** after submitting the documents the chairperson and the secretary of the CAE may visit the institution in order **to clear up any questions which have been posed and to specify the areas of enhancement.** The stakeholders to be interviewed shall also be agreed on. The programme should be represented by two people, preferably its director and some other person who has been involved in the monitoring and/or management process of the IQAS. On the preliminary visit it will be decided whether the external assessment process may be continued or whether, depending on the evidence provided, it would be appropriate to postpone it.

On the basis of the preliminary visit or, when none is made, on the basis of the analysis of the self-assessment report and of the evidence, the CAE will issue a preliminary report with the actions which should be carried out in order to improve information and assure the good performance of the process.

- 8) **Assessment.** The assessment involves the analysis of all the documents submitted and especially of the enhancement plan, which should be added to the report for the accreditation of the programme. The external reviewers are to use the provided rubric table, giving appropriate examples.
- 9) **Organisation of the visit.** Following on from the preliminary visit, the programme organises the timetable for the visit, which defines the various focus group meetings to be held as agreed beforehand with the CAE (teaching staff, PhD students and qualified doctors, support staff members/administration and services, employers, the academic committee and programme coordinator, QA team, etc.) and the visit to the facilities. Space and facilities will also need to be set aside for the work of the CAE.
- 10) **The actual visit.** The main objective is to verify the delivery *in situ* of the study programme. 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 a suitable average time for most visits.
- 11) **Preliminary external assessment and accreditation reports.** In a period of **between four and six weeks** after the visit, the CAE will send to the respective Specific Assessment Committee (CEA, from the Catalan) the draft external assessment report (IAE, from the Catalan) so that the CEA may take it into consideration and prepare the accreditation reports (IdA, from the Catalan). It is envisaged that the institution will receive these reports within a period of about **eight weeks**.

The rubrics given in the examples should be used in the drafting of the external assessment report, which should also include the good practices and the aspects which are required to be enhanced.

The CEA should draft the respective accreditation report once the draft IAE has been received and the aforementioned documents have been considered. This report will be either favourable or unfavourable, stating the aspects which should necessarily be amended in order to obtain a positive report.

- 12) **Issue of preliminary reports and allegations.** AQU Catalunya will issue jointly the IAE and IdA. Within a period of maximum **twenty days**, the institution may submit the allegations which it deems appropriate in relation to the preliminary reports, so that the CAE and the CEA may take them into consideration. The allegations should compulsorily include the new enhancement plan for the programme and contain the pertinent actions

which are considered appropriate for correcting the weaknesses observed by the CAE and the CEA.

- 13) **Final reports.** Within a period of about **twenty days**, the CAE, after receiving and studying the allegations, will draft the final IAE proposal, which it should send to the respective CEA so that the latter, together with the allegations received, may draft the final IdA. AQU Catalunya will issue jointly the IAE and IdA.

If the accreditation report states that it is necessary to introduce enhancements, it will stipulate jointly with the representatives of the degree programme the deadline for implementing enhancements, **which under no circumstances may exceed two years**. Once this period has elapsed, the programme will submit, together with the monitoring report, the evidence which justifies the start-up of the required measures.

The **IdA** will be issued in a maximum time of **nine months counting from the date of the accreditation application**. Otherwise, it will be understood that the degree programme is accredited.

- 14) **Communication of accreditation.** AQU Catalunya will communicate the outcome of the accreditation to the Government of Catalonia, to the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and to the Council of Universities. The procedure for lodging appeals in objection to the accreditation result and the qualitative evaluation of the accreditation is detailed in section 2.3.
- 15) **Register.** Once the final resolution has been issued, the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport will communicate it to the Register of Universities, Higher Education Centres and Degree Programmes (RUCT, from the Catalan). In the event in which it is favourable, it will proceed to register the respective renewal of accreditation. If it is unfavourable, the degree programme will be recorded in RUCT as terminated as from that date. In such case, the resolution that is issued will declare the curriculum to be terminated and suitable measures should be established to assure the academic rights of the students who are in the process of carrying out the respective studies.

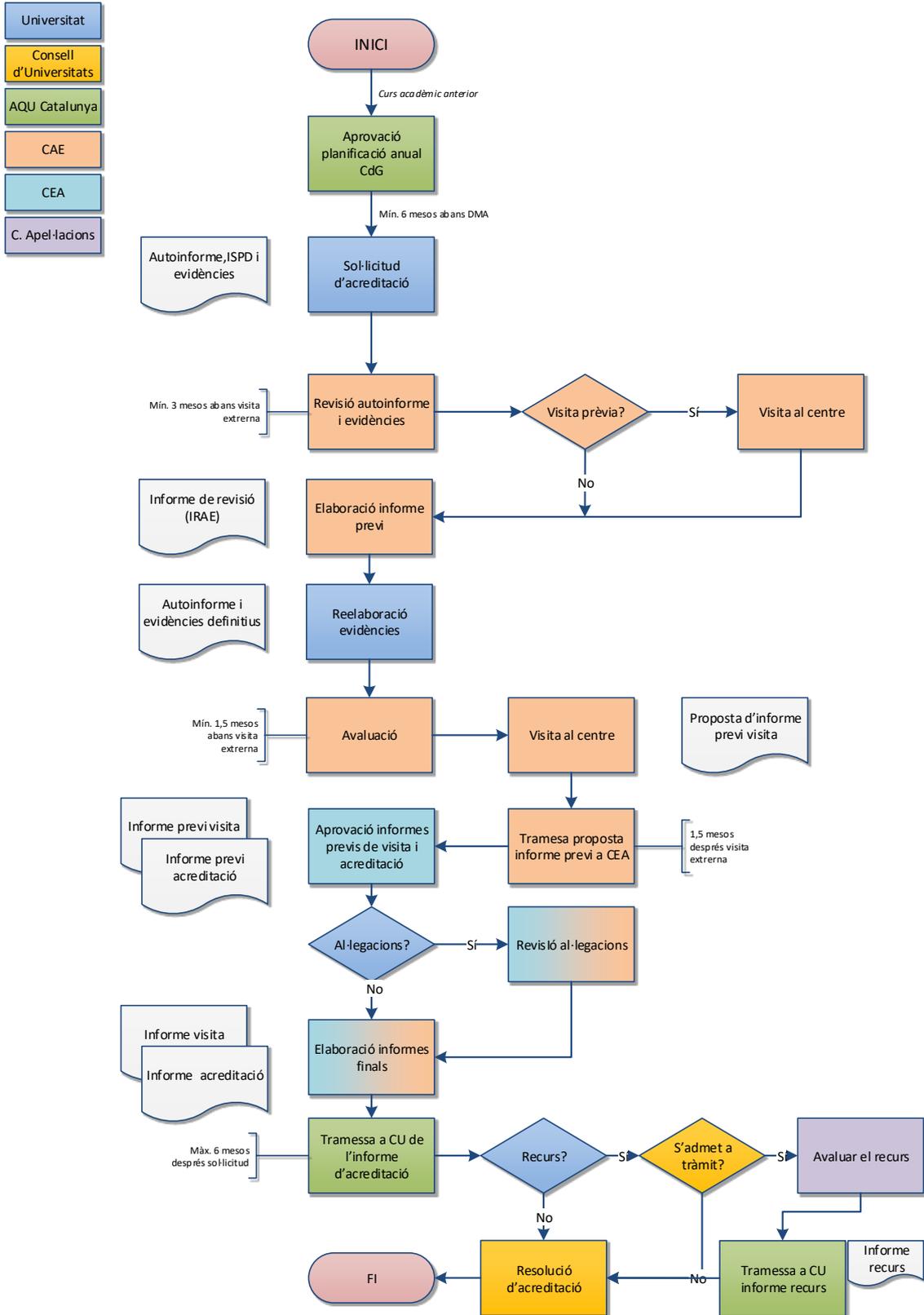
2.3. The appeal procedure

AQU Catalunya will communicate the outcome of the accreditation to the competent Spanish ministry for universities and to the Council of Universities. Once the resolution to award or reject accreditation has been issued by the Council of Universities, the university may lodge an appeal to said body within a maximum period of one month counting from the day immediately after the date on which notification is received.



Moreover, in relation to the resolution awarding the qualitative evaluation of the accreditation, which includes the results “compliant with conditions”, “compliant” and “progressing towards excellence”, the university may lodge an appeal to the Appeals Committee within a period of one month counting from the day immediately after the date on which notification is received.

An organisational chart of the procedure for assessing accreditation is set out below:



2.4. Preparation of self-assessment reports

The processes and procedures associated with the quality assurance of courses are described in each institution's internal quality assurance system (IQAS) and their primary goal should be the continual improvement of PhD programmes and the achievement of the accreditation objective. The IQAS is therefore the primary source of information and serves as an essential instrument for PhD programme accreditation.

In order to guarantee the quality of the process, the self-assessment report should be, amongst other things:

- Complete, rigorous and specific. The report should include an analysis and assessment of what are considered the key elements for the particular context being analysed and for enhancement.
- Based on evidence produced throughout the programme's delivery.
- Systematic and detailed in the analysis of the causes and consequently of whatever is necessary to carry through the improvements and enhancements.
- Balanced, in terms of both the positive aspects and aspects to be improved or enhanced.
- Shared and validated by the university community in order to ensure its representation in the analysis, according to the procedures laid down in the IQAS.

Responsibility for preparing the self-assessment report

Specifications shall be made in the IQAS to determine the parties responsible for preparing and approving the self-assessment report. The body set up will need to take into consideration the views of representatives from the PhD programme's various stakeholders, such as academic coordinators, teaching staff, administrative staff, PhD students and any others considered appropriate.

In line with the monitoring guide,⁶ the most recent PhD programme monitoring report (ISPD, from the Catalan) prior to the accreditation procedure shall serve as the self-assessment report for the accreditation visit; therefore, it will also need to be submitted to an **open public consultation process involving the entire education community associated with the programme**.

⁶ Guide to the monitoring of PhD programmes <http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_41207915_1.pdf>

Systematic data collection

Due consideration should be given to all the evidence and indicators stemming from the procedures set out in the IQAS when preparing the self-assessment report. Data and analyses on both the PhD programme and the unit responsible should be taken into account. Information may be quantitative or qualitative and consist of a host of elements ranging from management data and indicators on inputs to processes and outcomes of the activity of the PhD school or unit.

Once all information is available, the body in charge will need to thoroughly analyse and discuss the data and figures in order to meet the accreditation standards and outline an enhancement plan.

The self-assessment report shall encompass the period from the point of validation to the time of the external site visit for accreditation. All data and indicators used must be up-to-date for the most recent academic year completed.

Contents of the self-assessment report

The institution will need to consider whether the accreditation quality standards are being met or whether actions need to be undertaken in order to meet them. It is advisable for the self-assessment reports to incorporate the following content:

1. Programme presentation

In this section, the institution needs to provide the reader with an overview of the programme. This can include data and figures on significant achievements in the programme, such as the number of PhD students and qualified doctors, teaching staff and type of teaching staff, etc.

2. The process of producing the self-assessment report

A brief description is necessary of the production and preparation of the self-assessment report specifying whether any issues arose during the process (data collection, etc.) or any diversions from the aspects envisaged in the IQAS. The body in charge, the preparation period, and the date of approval should all be clearly stated.

3. Assessment of compliance with the accreditation standards

In this section, the institution has to provide evidence-based reasoning for the degree to which the accreditation standards have been met.

Depending on the standard in question, the PhD programme and/or the institution should carry out an assessment referring directly to the foremost data that

demonstrates the standards have been met. In each case, it will be necessary to make an assessment of the degree to which the desired goals and the programme specifications have been fulfilled (for example, if the desired number of defended theses has been achieved, if the number of research lines is reasonable, etc.). The standards that should be taken into consideration are as follows:

1. Quality of the training programme.
2. Relevance of public information.
3. Efficiency of the internal quality assurance system.
4. Suitability of teaching staff.
5. Effectiveness of learning support systems.
6. Quality of programme learning outcomes.

In the self-assessment report it is advisable to include a valuation of the extent to which each of these standards has been met. Along these lines, the institution could adopt the following assessment scale:

- **Progressing towards excellence.** *The standard is reached in full and, furthermore, examples of best practices are identified that exceed the required minimums.*
- **Compliant.** *The standard is reached in full within the PhD programme.*
- **Compliant with conditions.** *The standard is reached to the minimum extent admissible although aspects are identified that must be enhanced. The improvements that need to be implemented are such that it would be possible to do so within a reasonable timeframe.*
- **Non-compliant.** *The PhD programme fails to achieve the minimum level required to reach the respective standard. The improvements that need to be implemented are so substantial that it would not be possible to reach the standard within a reasonable timeframe.*

4. Assessment and proposal of the quality enhancement plan

The PhD programme shall analyse and reflect on its functioning and delivery. This should be based on the public information as well as the data, indicators and qualitative information obtained from the IQAS. In this section, an overall assessment can be made to sum up the extent of programme delivery, if the institution deems it pertinent.

In light of the assessment analysis, proposals and plans shall be made for enhancement actions (giving due detail of each one and designating responsibilities and timeframes) to be incorporated into an enhancement plan. The more closely

associated these actions are with the goals and outcomes specified in the programme indicators, the more effective they may be.

A specific response should be given to the actions proposed and planned in the ISPD from the previous period, specifying those that have since been implemented and detailing the reasons why others could not be implemented. The latter actions should by and large be included again in the proposal for the upcoming period.

The enhancement plan should be prepared in an organised, hierarchical fashion. In addition, the tasks, the persons responsible, the priority for action and the implementation schedule should all be established. It is also desirable for indicators to be envisaged in order to monitor each of the enhancement actions identified.

By way of example, a table with potential content for the enhancement plan is shown below:

Diagnosis	Identification of causes	Targets to meet	Proposed actions	Priority	Person responsible	Timeframes	Are changes involved?	Level (programme, unit, univ.)

It should be borne in mind that any enhancement proposals must be linked to the weaknesses identified and the causes behind them.

5. Evidence

The evidence is shown in this guide under each standard and **it will need to be taken into consideration in drawing up the self-assessment report and made available to the CAE.**

A self-assessment report template is available from AQU Catalunya as shown in annex I hereof to help universities compile the information corresponding to these sections.

2.5. Criteria for accreditation

The outcome of the accreditation will be expressed as **favourable or unfavourable**, according to four levels:

- a. **Accredited progressing towards excellence.** Most of the accreditation standards are assessed as “progressing towards excellence” and, consequently, numerous good practices which exceed the required minimum level are identified.
- b. **Accredited.** Compliance is made with all the accreditation standards, at least on their minimum level.
- c. **Accredited with conditions.** Compliance is not made with all the accreditation standards. Problems are detected which may be solved in a reasonable period of time.

- d.* **Not accredited.** Compliance is not made with most of the accreditation criteria or with the most significant accreditation criteria.

In order to obtain accreditation “**progressing towards excellence**”, the following three conditions should be met:

- a.* No standard should be assessed as “compliant with conditions” or “non-compliant”.
- b.* At least two standards should be assessed as “progressing towards excellence” including, compulsorily, either Standard 4 or Standard 6. Moreover, it is established that in order for Standards 4 and 6 to be assessed as “progressing towards excellence”, as a minimum Substandard 4.1 (Accredited research activity) and Substandard 6.1. (Academic level of PhD theses and coherence with the training model), respectively, should obtain this same assessment.
- c.* Substandard 4.1 and Substandard 6.1 should be assessed as “progressing towards excellence”.

The programme **will be accredited with conditions** in the event of any of the following three conditions:

- a.* When three standards are assessed as “compliant with conditions”.
- b.* When at least two standards are assessed as “compliant with conditions” and one of them is either Standard 4 or Standard 6. If Substandard 4.1 and Substandard 6.1 are assessed as “compliant with conditions”, Standards 4 and 6, respectively, will also be assessed as “compliant with conditions”.
- c.* When Substandard 6.1 (Academic level of PhD theses and coherence with the training profile) is assessed as “compliant with conditions”.

A qualification will not be accredited when any of the following standards is assessed as “non-compliant”:

- a.* Standard 1: Quality of the training programme.
- b.* Standard 4: Suitability of teaching staff.
- c.* Standard 5: Effectiveness of learning support systems.
- d.* Standard 6: Quality of programme learning outcomes.



In short, in order for a PhD programme to be classed as progressing towards excellence, the number of students expected should be enrolled; the theses should be completed in the planned timeframe, to a high quality, giving measurable outcomes in terms of scientific contributions; and teaching staff should be active in research, with sexennials (or similar), competitive research projects and quality scientific contributions. All of these areas may be demonstrated in the analysis of the six dimensions that form this guide.

3. CRITERIA AND STANDARDS OF THE ASSESSMENT

This section deals in greater depth with the information and evidence to be analysed in section 3 of the self-assessment report (Assessment of compliance with the accreditation standards).

3.1. Quality of the training programme

In order for society to place its trust in the academic quality of study programmes, it is necessary to set up a benchmark qualifications framework that is known and endorsed by senior officials from the EHEA, which also allows for mutual recognition between the member states. It is within this context that the Spanish qualifications framework for higher education (MECES, from the Spanish) has been developed in alignment with the Dublin descriptors.

This framework is valid for higher education institutions and entities responsible for the external quality assurance of degree programmes. It should also promote a shared understanding of the expectations associated with qualifications that allows for the consistent use of degrees awarded and facilitates the international mobility of graduates.

Institutions should have processes in their IQAS which allow the design and approval of the study programmes, in a way that is consistent with the European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, especially **ESG 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes)**, which provides that “HEIs should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area”, as well as **ESG 1.3 (Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment)** which provides that “HEIs should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach” (ENQA, 2015). Lastly, it is paramount for procedures to be in place for admission, recognition and completion in line with the envisaged goals, and for entrance policies and admission criteria and procedures to be applied in a consistent, transparent manner in keeping with **ESG 1.4 (Student admission, progression, recognition and certification)**.

It is necessary to reflect on whether the study programme meets the following standard:

The study programme design (research lines, skills profile and training activities) is current according to the requirements of the educational field and it meets the required level of study according to the MECES.

In the case of Catalan institutions, this standard is already deemed as met if the validation procedure on recognised PhD study programmes gave a positive outcome. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to reflect on the admission profile of enrolled students and on PhD student supervision within the PhD programmes. In this section, the programme should analyse the admission profile, the distribution of students according to research lines and the remaining indicators and statistical data concerning supervision and training activities, taking into consideration the gender perspective. It should also implement actions for improvement when a lack of equality is identified between male and female PhD students.

This standard is broken down into the following specific standards:

- 1.1. The programme has mechanisms in place to ensure that the admission profile of PhD students is suitable and that the number of students is consistent with the characteristics and distribution of the programme's research lines and the number of places available.
- 1.2. The programme has suitable mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.

Also in this section the institution should detail all non-substantial modifications it has incorporated into its qualification and, if applicable, justify the relevance of them and demonstrate that the skills profile has been maintained.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:⁷

- An updated report for the validation of the study programme (AQU Catalunya).
- A report on validation and, where applicable, modifications of the study programme (AQU Catalunya).

The **indicators** that need to be borne in mind in order to assess this standard are as follows:

- Number of places available.

⁷ The institution(s) providing said evidence is(/are) shown in brackets.

- Demand.
- New incoming students enrolled.
- Total number of students enrolled.
- Percentage of foreign students enrolled.
- Percentage of students who previously undertook Master's programmes at other universities.
- Percentage of part-time students enrolled.
- Percentage of students with a scholarship.
- Percentage of students according to entrance requirements.
- Percentage of students according to research line.

The indicators must be offered for each academic year to assess their development throughout the entire period encompassed by the accreditation. Moreover, indicators relating to students should envisage all circumstances: full-time and part-time, and students changing their study mode (beginning on full-time and ending on part-time and vice versa).

Rubrics

1.1. The programme has mechanisms in place to ensure that the admission profile of PhD students is suitable and that the number of students is consistent with the characteristics and distribution of the programme's research lines and the number of places available.	
Progressing towards excellence	The programme has highly adequate mechanisms in place to ensure the suitability of the profile and number of students.
	All students have the appropriate profile, in line with the field and characteristics of the programme.
	The number of students is highly adequate given the original number of places available, the research lines and the characteristics of the programme.
Compliant	The programme has mechanisms in place to ensure the suitability of the profile and number of students.
	Most students have the appropriate profile, in line with the field and characteristics of the programme.

	The number of students is consistent given the original number of places available, the research lines and the characteristics of the programme.
Compliant with conditions	The programme has mechanisms in place that partly ensure the suitability of the profile and number of students.
	Some students have the appropriate profile, in line with the field and characteristics of the programme.
	The number of students enrolling differs from the number of places available and/or is only partly consistent with the research lines and the characteristics of the programme.
Non-compliant	The programme does not have mechanisms in place that ensure the suitability of the profile and number of students.
	Most students do not have the appropriate profile, in line with the field and characteristics of the programme.
	The number of students enrolling differs greatly from the number of places available and there is no consistency with the research lines and the characteristics of the programme.
1.2. The programme has suitable mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.	
Progressing towards excellence	The programme has highly adequate mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.
Compliant	The programme has adequate mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.
Compliant with conditions	The programme has mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities that show shortcomings.
Non-compliant	The programme has inadequate mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.

3.2. Relevance of public information

Information transparency is the key to building trust in – and increasing competitiveness based on – the quality of university education, and is why it appears in one way or another in all of the declarations and communiqués of the ministers

responsible for higher education in the EHEA, as reflected in, amongst others, the communiqués of the ministerial conferences in Bergen and London:

“Building on the achievements so far in the Bologna Process, we wish to establish a European Higher Education Area based on the principles of quality and transparency”, Bergen Communiqué, 19-20 May 2005.

“Qualifications frameworks are important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems. They should also help HEIs to develop modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits, and improve the recognition of qualifications as well as all forms of prior learning.” London Communiqué, 18 May 2007.

The importance of transparency is evident throughout the European standards defined by ENQA, in which reference is made to access to the information on programmes by the different stakeholder groups (ENQA, 2015). The aim of this accreditation standard is to encompass the important role of the public information connected with the study programme.

According to **ESG 1.8 (Public information)**, “HEIs should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.” HEIs should provide information that includes the supply of programmes and the selection criteria; the expected learning outcomes; the qualifications to which they lead; the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used; the academic outcomes obtained; the opportunities for learning available to students; and the information on the employability of degree holders.

The publication of the information ensures transparency and facilitates accountability, in harmony with the European references in matters of quality in higher education. Specifically, with respect to **ESG 1.7 (Information management)**, “HEIs should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities”.

Additionally, in the guidelines of **ESG 1.1 (Policy for quality assurance)** it is established that in order to favour this objective, the policy should be public.

In order to assure the quality of public information, HEIs should reflect periodically on the validity, relevance and updating of public information, its accessibility and the continuous enhancement processes which assure its quality.

It is necessary to reflect on whether the study programme meets the following standard:

The institution appropriately informs all stakeholders of the PhD programme's characteristics and the management processes for quality assurance.

The overall standard is divided into the following specific standards:

- 2.1. The HEI publishes truthful, complete, up-to-date and accessible information on the characteristics of the PhD programme, its operational delivery and the outcomes achieved.
- 2.2. The institution guarantees easy access to relevant information on the PhD programme for all stakeholders, which includes monitoring and, where applicable, accreditation outcomes.
- 2.3. The HEI publishes the IQAS which forms the framework of the PhD programme.

The institution should reflect on whether the information it publicly discloses is complete, visible, aggregated and up-to-date. Table 1.1 shows the content that should be available on the institution's website with regard to the operational delivery of PhD programmes.

This reflection on the relevance of publicly-disclosed information should also take into consideration the gender perspective. Along these lines, the programme must consider:

- Inclusive graphic and written language.
- Publication of data and indicators broken down by gender.

Table 1.1. Content of publicly-disclosed information on the operational delivery of PhD programmes

DIMENSION	CONTENT
ADMISSION TO THE PHD PROGRAMME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme objectives. - Admission profile. - Graduation profile. - Number of places available. - Enrolment period and procedure. - Entrance requirements and criteria. - Procedure for the assignment of the thesis supervisor and tutor. - Bridging courses. - Scholarships.
ORGANISATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research lines. - Training activities. - Procedure for the preparation and defence of the research plan.

OPERATIVE PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic regulations. - Study programme duration and continuance. - Academic calendar. - Learning resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Virtual communication forums. o Laboratories. o Library. o Others. - Internal quality assurance system.
TEACHING STAFF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme teaching staff. - Academic and research profile. - Contact information.
MOBILITY PROGRAMMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objectives. - General regulations. - Scholarships.
PhD THESIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulations and general framework (assessment, submission, defence, international mention in the PhD qualification, structure, etc.). - Theses defended during recent academic years.
ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key labour market opportunities (businesses, universities and other institutions) for the PhD students on the programme.

Public information related to the data and corresponding indicators can also be divided into categories to allow a distinction between indicators relating to admission and enrolment, teaching staff, stakeholder satisfaction, research stays and academic and labour market-related outcomes.

Table 1.2 sets out the **minimum indicators** – the university may expand upon them – to be published by the institution when it comes to the operational delivery of PhD programmes. In line with the definitions set by UNEIX, these indicators should be from the last academic year available.

Table 1.2. Minimum indicators that should be published (available on UNEIX/WINDDAT)

DIMENSION	INDICATORS
STUDY PROGRAMME QUALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available places. - Demand. - New incoming students enrolled. - Total number of students enrolled. - Percentage of foreign students enrolled. - Percentage of students who previously undertook Master's programmes at other universities. - Percentage of part-time students enrolled. - Percentage of students with a scholarship.
TEACHING STAFF SUITABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of defended thesis supervisors. - Percentage of defended thesis supervisors with sexennials in progress.

DIMENSION	INDICATORS
EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Satisfaction of PhD students with the study programme. - Satisfaction of thesis supervisors with the study programme.
QUALITY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of defended theses on the context of full-time study. - Number of defended theses on the context of part-time study. - Average duration of the PhD programme when studied full-time. - Average duration of the PhD programme when studied part-time. - Study programme drop-out percentage. - Percentage of doctors with an international mention. - Number of scientific outcomes of PhD theses. - Percentage of students on the PhD programme that have undertaken research stays. - Employment rate. - Rate of suitability of work in relation to the study programme.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:

- The website of either the HEI or the programme (university).
- Documentation connected with IQAS processes dealing with public information, the compilation of information and accountability (university).

Rubrics

2.1. The HEI publishes truthful, complete, up-to-date and accessible information on the characteristics of the PhD programme, its operational delivery and the outcomes achieved.	
Progressing towards excellence	Up-to-date, exhaustive and pertinent information is offered on the characteristics of the PhD programme and its operational delivery.
	The information is very clear, legible, aggregated and accessible to all stakeholders.
Compliant	Pertinent information is offered on the characteristics of the PhD programme and its operational delivery.
	The information is clear, legible, aggregated and accessible to all stakeholders.
Compliant with conditions	Partial information is offered on the characteristics of the PhD programme and its operational delivery.
	The published information shows certain shortcomings with respect to clarity, legibility, aggregation and accessibility.

Non-compliant	Inadequate information on the PhD programme's characteristics and its operational delivery.
	The published information shows serious shortcomings with respect to clarity, legibility, aggregation and accessibility.
2.2. The institution guarantees easy access to relevant information on the PhD programme for all stakeholders, which includes monitoring and, where applicable, accreditation outcomes.	
Progressing towards excellence	Stakeholders have easy access to information that is complete and aggregated and includes academic outcomes and programme satisfaction.
Compliant	The institution provides stakeholders with access to information that includes academic outcomes and programme satisfaction.
Compliant with conditions	The institution provides stakeholders with partial access to information.
Non-compliant	The institution does not provide easy access to information or fails to include information on academic outcomes and programme satisfaction.
2.3. The HEI publishes the IQAS which forms the framework of the PhD programme.	
Progressing towards excellence	The HEI publishes and disseminates exhaustively the quality policy, the IQAS processes and the elements derived from it for accountability, including the monitoring and accreditation outcomes.
Compliant	The HEI publishes the quality policy, the IQAS processes and the elements derived from it for accountability, including the monitoring and accreditation outcomes.
Compliant with conditions	The HEI publishes partially the quality policy, the IQAS processes and the elements derived from it for accountability, including the monitoring and accreditation outcomes.
Non-compliant	The HEI does not publish the quality policy, the IQAS processes and the elements derived from it for accountability.

3.3. Efficacy of the internal quality assurance system

Consistent with the trust placed by society in autonomous management in the universities and the transparency called for within the framework of the EHEA, universities should ensure that their actions are appropriately guided to achieve the objectives associated with the programmes and courses that they deliver. Universities consequently need policies and internal quality assurance systems that

have a formal status and are publicly available. The IQAS is therefore a key instrument for defining the faculty's teaching activities.

The design and implementation of the IQAS respond to the European standards and guidelines (ESG) for the internal assurance of quality in HEIs, especially in the case of **ESG 1.1 (Quality assurance policy)** and **1.9 (Continuous monitoring and periodic review of programmes)** (ENQA, 2015). As stated in ESG 1.1, "HEIs should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders". These internal stakeholders assume their responsibility for quality and commit themselves to its assurance on all levels and to develop a quality culture. In order to achieve this objective, they should develop and implement a strategy for the on-going enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and they should be publicly available.

Likewise, according to **ESG 1.9**, HEIs "should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous enhancement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned". Moreover, this outlook was also suitably provided in Royal Decree 1393/2007, which establishes the management of the recognised university studies, amended by Royal Decree 861/2010, which states that the universities should ensure that their actions assure the achievement of the objectives associated with the training which they offer; and also by Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29th May, on the Creation, Recognition, Authorisation and Accreditation of Universities and Faculties, which establishes the certification of the IQAS as the prior step for the institutional accreditation of faculties.

At the time of programme accreditation, it is expected that the HEI already has a formally established and sufficiently implemented IQAS, which assures the quality of the programmes that it covers and consequently defines the processes for the design, approval, implementation, monitoring, revision, improvement and, finally, accreditation of its study programmes. This moment, which is related to the external assurance of quality in higher education, should also respond to **ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance)**, which states that "External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes [...]".

It is necessary to reflect on whether the study programme meets the following standard:

The HEI has a functioning internal quality assurance system that has a formal status and assures the quality and continuous enhancement of the PhD programme in an efficient way.

The overall standard is broken down into the following specific standards:

- 3.1. The IQAS implemented facilitates the processes for the design and approval of the PhD programme, its monitoring and its accreditation.
- 3.2. The IQAS implemented ensures information and relevant outcomes are compiled for effective management of the PhD programmes.
- 3.3. The IQAS implemented is reviewed periodically in order to analyse its suitability and, where applicable, an enhancement plan is put forward in order to optimise it.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:

- **IQAS documentation** (university):
 - Process for the design and approval of PhD programmes.
 - Process for monitoring PhD programmes.
 - Process for accreditation of PhD programmes.
 - Process for IQAS review.
- **Plans and monitoring of PhD programme enhancement plans** (university).
- **Instruments for compiling information on the level of stakeholder satisfaction** (university).

The gender perspective should also be present in the internal quality assurance system implemented. Specifically, the programme may consider:

- a. Procedures to guarantee the inclusion of the gender perspective in teaching materials.
- b. Gender policy: goals and implementation.
- c. Situation and monitoring reports.
- d. Procedures for the implementation and development of the gender perspective within the institution.
- e. The institution's equality plan: monitoring and review.
- f. The incorporation of the gender perspective in the processes for the design, monitoring and accreditation of study programmes.
- g. Indicators on effective equality between men and women.

- h.* Training on the gender perspective for people in charge of quality assurance at the institution/on the study programme.

Rubrics

3.1. The IQAS implemented facilitates the processes for the design and approval of the PhD programme, its monitoring and its accreditation.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	The IQAS comprises an implemented process that facilitates optimum programme design and approval, as well as programme monitoring and accreditation, with the involvement of all the stakeholders.
<i>Compliant</i>	The IQAS comprises an implemented process that facilitates programme design and approval, as well as programme monitoring and accreditation, with the involvement of the most important stakeholders.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	The IQAS comprises an implemented process that partially facilitates programme design and approval, as well as programme monitoring and accreditation.
<i>Non-compliant</i>	The IQAS does not comprise any process (or it has not been implemented) for programme design and/or approval, monitoring and accreditation.
3.2. The IQAS implemented ensures information and relevant outcomes are compiled for effective management of the PhD programmes.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	The IQAS has an implemented process that optimally manages the collection of relevant outcomes, with the existence of a table of indicators providing complete information on its evolution in time.
	The IQAS allows for the compilation of information on stakeholder satisfaction (in particular, that of graduates, PhD students, teaching staff and employers) with the programme of studies.
<i>Compliant</i>	The IQAS has an implemented process that manages the collection of relevant outcomes, with the existence of a table of indicators providing information on its evolution in time.
	The IQAS provides for the compilation of information on the satisfaction of PhD students and graduates with the programme of studies.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	The IQAS has an implemented process that partially manages the collection of relevant outcomes, with the existence of a table of indicators providing partial information on its evolution in time.

	The IQAS compiles information on PhD students satisfaction only with regard to certain aspects of the programme of study.
Non-compliant	The IQAS does not have a process (or it is not implemented) for the management of the collection of the outcomes of the programme. The data which it possesses are partial and do not include any time series.
	The IQAS does not compile any information on stakeholder satisfaction with the programme.
3.3. The IQAS implemented is reviewed periodically in order to analyse its suitability and, where applicable, an enhancement plan is put forward in order to optimise it.	
Progressing towards excellence	The IQAS has an implemented process that obliges the HEI to periodically and completely review the suitability of the IQAS itself. The revision is materialised in a report that presents a reflection on the operation of the IQAS and that allows the tracking of the changes carried out.
	The enhancement actions of the IQAS are consistent with the revision carried out and are structured in enhancement plans that include all the necessary elements for the optimum periodic monitoring of their implementation.
Compliant	The IQAS has an implemented process for its revision which is materialised in a report that presents a reflection on the operation of the IQAS and that includes the changes carried out on the system.
	The enhancement actions of the IQAS are consistent with the revision carried out and are structured in enhancement plans that include the minimum necessary elements to carry out a sufficient monitoring of the implementation of the measures.
Compliant with conditions	The IQAS has a process for its revision but it is not implemented. Some non-systematic revision and enhancement actions are carried out on the processes of the IQAS.
	The enhancement actions of the IQAS have a partial scope and prioritisation, and their monitoring is not systematic.
Non-compliant	The IQAS does not have a process for its revision.
	Revision and improvement actions are not carried out on the IQAS.

3.4. Suitability of teaching staff

Teaching staff will need suitable experience and training in line with the aims of the PhD programme, and there must be a sufficient number of teachers with a suitable

number of teaching hours in order to cover the main academic tasks: thesis supervision and tutorials, delivery and assessment of training activities, and, if applicable, programme management, etc.

Assuring the quality and suitability of teachers responds directly to the European standards for internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, and specifically to **ESG 1.5 (Quality assurance of teachers)**, which recommends that “HEIs should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff” (ENQA, 2015).

Teaching staff on the PhD programme shall be composed of teaching and research staff from the unit responsible for the PhD programme who are involved in the delivery of tuition on the programme (tutoring, thesis supervision, delivery of training activities, membership on the academic committee, monitoring committees, etc.). Under exceptional circumstances other doctors may form part of the teaching staff in accordance with the bylaws of the PhD school / university.

The **tutor** is the individual responsible for ensuring that research and training activities are in accordance with the principles of the programmes and, as the case may be, those of PhD schools. Tutors shall be lecturers on the PhD programme. The role of thesis supervisor and tutor are commonly held by the same person when the former is also a lecturer on the PhD programme.

The **thesis supervisor** is the most senior person responsible for directing the host of research tasks conducted by the PhD student. The thesis supervisor shall be the most senior person in charge of ensuring the coherence and suitability of training activities, of impact and development in the field and of the topic area of the PhD thesis. The aforesaid individual will also be in charge of ensuring the aptness of the PhD students for the projects and activities they sign up for. Academic guidance tasks shall be organised jointly by the thesis supervisor and the tutor of the PhD student. It is not mandatory for the thesis supervisor to be a lecturer on the PhD programme.

Accordingly, it is expected for due reflection to be given to whether the PhD programme meets the following standard:

Teaching staff are both sufficient and suitable in accordance with the characteristics of the PhD programme, the scientific field and the number of students.

The standard is broken down into the following specific standards:

- 4.1. Teaching staff have accredited research activity.
- 4.2. Teaching staff are sufficient in number and work a suitable number of hours in order to perform their functions.
- 4.3. The PhD programme is supported by suitable actions in order to promote thesis supervision and PhD student tutoring.
- 4.4. The level of involvement of foreign teaching staff and international doctors in monitoring committees and thesis assessment boards is suitable for the scientific field of the programme.

It is necessary to reflect on whether the PhD programme maintains the initial validation conditions, particularly in relation to the following areas:

- The accredited experience of teaching and research staff who have supervised PhD theses.
- The quality of scientific contributions.
- The number of active competitive research projects.
- The internationalisation of teaching staff.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:

- Current competitive research projects in which the principal investigator is a lecturer on the programme (university).
- Teaching staff taking part in current competitive research projects (university).
- Scientific contributions of teaching staff which are relevant in the study programme field (university).
- Foreign lecturers⁸ among teaching staff supervising PhD theses and among staff delivering training activities (university).
- Results of actions addressed to teaching staff to encourage PhD thesis supervision (university).
- If necessary, a training plan or IQAS documents relating to the quality assurance of teaching staff, human resources policies, etc., may be taken into consideration (university).

⁸ Foreign teaching staff shall refer to all those lecturers who are not associated with a university from Catalonia or Spain.

The **indicators** that need to be borne in mind in order to assess this standard are as follows:

- Number of defended thesis supervisors (university).
- Percentage of teaching staff on the programme with sexennials in progress who have supervised PhD theses (university).
- Percentage of defended thesis supervisors with sexennials in progress (university).

The analysis of the gender perspective with regard to teaching staff may take into consideration the following statistical data and indicators (broken down by gender):

- a. Teaching staff structure:
 - Teaching staff profile:
 - i. Accredited research activity (research sexennials).
 - ii. Age.
 - Category.
- b. Thesis supervision.
- c. Research projects' supervision.
- d. Training on the gender perspective.
- e. Student satisfaction.

Rubrics

4.1. Teaching staff have accredited research activity.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	At least 75% of teaching staff involved with the PhD programme who have supervised PhD theses have accredited research activity.
<i>Compliant</i>	Around 60% of teaching staff involved with the PhD programme who have supervised PhD theses have accredited research activity.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	Less than 50% of teaching staff involved with the PhD programme who have supervised PhD theses have accredited research activity.
<i>Non-compliant</i>	Less than 25% of teaching staff involved with the PhD programme who have supervised PhD theses have accredited research activity.
4.2. Teaching staff are sufficient in number and work a suitable number of hours in order to perform their functions.	

<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	Both the teaching staff structure and the number of lecturers are highly suitable in order to supervise PhD theses, assist PhD students and, if applicable, deliver the training activities on the programme.
<i>Compliant</i>	Both the teaching staff structure and the number of lecturers are suitable in order to supervise PhD theses, assist PhD students and, if applicable, deliver the training activities on the programme.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	Both the teaching staff structure and the number of lecturers are insufficient in order to supervise PhD theses, assist PhD students and, if applicable, deliver the training activities on the programme.
<i>Non-compliant</i>	Both the teaching staff structure and the number of lecturers bear substantial shortcomings in order to be able to supervise PhD theses, assist PhD students and, if applicable, deliver the training activities on the programme.
4.3. The PhD programme is supported by suitable actions in order to promote thesis supervision and PhD student tutoring.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	The PhD programme (or the institution) has clear, highly suitable mechanisms in place for the recognition and promotion of tutoring and thesis supervision tasks.
<i>Compliant</i>	The PhD programme (or the institution) has mechanisms in place for the recognition and promotion of tutoring and thesis supervision tasks.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	The mechanisms for the recognition and promotion of tutoring and thesis supervision tasks put in place by the PhD programme (or the institution) bear shortcomings.
<i>Non-compliant</i>	The PhD programme (or the institution) does not have mechanisms in place for the recognition and promotion of tutoring and thesis supervision tasks.
4.4. The level of involvement of foreign teaching staff and international doctors in monitoring committees and thesis assessment boards is suitable for the scientific field of the programme.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	The programme benefits from broad, suitable presence of international persons with expertise in thesis assessment boards and in monitoring and preliminary reports committees.
<i>Compliant</i>	The programme benefits from the presence of international persons with expertise in thesis assessment boards and in monitoring and preliminary reports committees.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	The programme benefits from scant presence of international persons with expertise in thesis assessment boards and in monitoring and preliminary reports committees.

Non-compliant	The programme does not benefit from the presence of international persons with expertise in thesis assessment boards and in monitoring and preliminary reports committees.
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3.5. Effectiveness of learning support systems

In addition to the teaching staff, HEIs make a series of services and resources available to students to motivate, facilitate and enhance learning, regardless of location (on campus, distance learning, etc.). In this context, **ESG 1.6 (Learning resources and student support)** recommends that “HEIs should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided” (ENQA, 2015).

Accordingly, it is expected for the institution to give due reflection on whether the following standard is met:

The physical resources and services needed to deliver the activities envisaged in the PhD programme and for the training PhD students are sufficient and suitable in accordance with the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the programme.

This section refers to all of the services and resources that support student learning. The scope of this section includes:

- **Physical resources**, such as facilities (space for PhD students and their work, laboratories, computer rooms, library services, etc.), technological infrastructure, technical and scientific material and equipment, etc.
- **Services**, primarily reception and other logistics services (accommodation, advice on legal issues relating to residence, etc.), academic guidance services (scholarships, mobility, projects, etc.) and professional guidance and labour market access services.

The standard is broken down into the following specific standards:

- 5.1. The available physical resources are adequate for the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the PhD programme.
- 5.2. Services available to PhD students provide suitable support to the learning process and encourage access to the labour market.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:

- IQAS documentation on the process for the quality assurance of physical resources (university).
- Institutional plan of action for encouraging access to the labour market (university).
- IQAS documentation on the process for the support and guidance of PhD students (university).

The **indicators** that need to be borne in mind in order to assess this standard are as follows:

- PhD student satisfaction with the study programme (university).
- Thesis supervisor satisfaction with the study programme (university).

The analysis of the gender perspective with regard to the efficiency of the systems for learning support may take into consideration:

- a.* Presence of the gender perspective in the supervision of PhD students.
- b.* Inclusion of stipulations ensuring non-discrimination owing to gender in the agreement signed by male and female PhD students.
- c.* Existence of protocols to combat sexual harassment.
- d.* Non-sexist images and signage in the institution: changing rooms, toilets, signs.
- e.* Student mobility according to gender (students admitted to the programme and students departing for other programmes).
- f.* Mobility of teaching and research staff.
- g.* Professional guidance incorporating the gender perspective (pay, salary negotiation, motivation letters, recognition of stereotypes in the profession).
- h.* Training of administrative and services staff on the gender perspective.

Rubrics

5.1. The available physical resources are adequate for the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the PhD programme.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	The available physical resources and other services are highly suitable in order to ensure that research which should be conducted by PhD students is carried out.
<i>Compliant</i>	The available physical resources and other services are suitable in order to ensure that research which should be conducted by PhD students is carried out.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	The available physical resources and other services bear shortcomings when it comes to ensuring that research which should be conducted by PhD students is carried out.
<i>Non-compliant</i>	The available physical resources and other services fail to ensure that research which should be conducted by PhD students is smoothly carried out.
5.2. Services available to PhD students provide suitable support to the learning process and encourage access to the labour market.	
<i>Progressing towards excellence</i>	Services available to PhD students provide highly suitable support to the learning process and encourage access to the labour market.
	Students are highly satisfied with the services and physical resources at their disposal.
<i>Compliant</i>	Services available to PhD students provide suitable support to the learning process and encourage access to the labour market.
	Students are satisfied with the services and physical resources at their disposal.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	Services available to PhD students bear shortcomings in providing support to the learning process and encouraging access to the labour market.
	Students are partly satisfied with the services and physical resources at their disposal.
<i>Compliant with conditions</i>	Services available to PhD students fail to provide suitable support to the learning process and fail to encourage access to the labour market.
	Students are dissatisfied with the services and physical resources at their disposal.

3.6. Quality of (learning) outcomes

The programme outcomes need to be enumerated and analysed for programme review and enhancement. “Programme learning outcomes” means not only the learning and academic outcomes, but also labour market outcomes and stakeholder satisfaction.

The assessment of learning associated with the preparation of the PhD thesis is a procedure that makes it possible to establish the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved, as stated in **ESG 1.3 (Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment)**, which recommends that “HEIs should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach” (ENQA, 2015). PhD theses, and indeed training activities and the assessment system, need to be relevant, public and adequate to certify the intended learning outcomes set out in the education profile. The fitness of purpose of the system for assessment infers a judgement regarding its relevance (validity) and an assessment of the level of discrimination of these activities and their assurance of quality (reliability). In addition, institutions will need to ensure processes and instruments are put in place in order to compile information on student progression, to monitor such progression and to act accordingly pursuant to the provisions of **ESG 1.4 (Student admission, progression, recognition and certification)**.

The labour market outcomes of PhD students are also assessed in this section, as these are one of the key outcomes of university studies. This section makes use of the wealth of information on this aspect of the Catalan university system, which provides for a contextualised analysis of the main indicators.

Accordingly, it is expected that due reflection will be given to whether the study programme meets the following standard:

The learning outcomes achieved, supported by the doctoral theses and the scientific results derived from them, are consistent with the intended training profile. The quantitative results of the indicators in terms of academic performance, satisfaction and access to the labour market are adequate.

The standard is broken down into the following specific standards:

6.1. The learning outcomes achieved correspond to the training objectives set and to the level established for PhD programmes in the Catalan Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (MCQ).

- 6.2. The number of PhD theses defended, their duration and the scientific results derived from them are adequate and consistent with the intended training profile.
- 6.3. PhD students, graduates and faculty are satisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.
- 6.4. The values for the graduate labour market indicators are adequate for the characteristics of the PhD programme.

Evidence that should be taken into consideration in order to assess this standard is as follows:

- **PhD theses** produced on the context of the PhD programme (point 6.1) (university).
- **Information** on training activities and assessment systems (point 6.1) (university).

The **indicators** that need to be borne in mind in order to assess this standard – specifically point 6.2 – are as follows:

- Number of defended theses on the context of full-time study.
- Number of defended theses on the context of part-time study.
- Average duration of the PhD programme when studied full-time.
- Average duration of the PhD programme when studied part-time.
- Study programme drop-out percentage.
- Percentage of doctors with an international mention.
- Number of scientific outcomes of PhD theses.
- Percentage of students on the PhD programme that have undertaken research stays (of 3 months or longer).

The **indicators** that need to be borne in mind in order to assess this standard – specifically point 6.3 – are as follows:

- Employment rate.
- Rate of suitability of work in relation to the study programme.

Academic results should be analysed also from the gender perspective. The programme should answer for:

- Equality in the duration of study programmes according to gender.

- Equality in progression within study programmes.
- Equality in graduation.
- Gender-based differences in access to the labour market.
- Differences between the genders in terms of satisfaction with the study programmes followed.

All indicators must be offered for each academic year to assess their development throughout the entire period encompassed by the accreditation.

Rubrics

6.1. The learning outcomes achieved correspond to the training objectives set and to the level established for PhD programmes in the Catalan Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (MCQ).	
Progressing towards excellence	The documented evidence on the achievements of PhD students, particularly on the PhD thesis and other research outcomes, reveals a high level of training and shows that the requirements of the necessary level of qualifications, as described in the MCQ, are met to a highly satisfactory standard.
	The PhD theses are based on a planned topic in accordance with the research or knowledge transfer lines or groups to which the teaching staff belong.
	The methodology used and the training activities developed are satisfactorily in line with the learning outcomes. The DAD (doctorand activity document) assessment criteria, research plans and doctoral theses are highly appropriate to certify that all doctoral students have achieved the learning outcomes.
Compliant	The documented evidence on the achievements of PhD students, particularly on the PhD thesis and other research outcomes, reveals a high level of training and shows that the requirements of the necessary level of qualifications, as described in the MCQ, are met to a satisfactory standard.
	Most PhD theses are based on a planned topic in accordance with the research or knowledge transfer lines or groups to which the teaching staff belong.
	The methodology used and the training activities developed are in line with the learning outcomes. The DAD assessment criteria, research plans, and doctoral theses are appropriate to certify that all doctoral students have achieved the learning outcomes.
Compliant with conditions	The documented evidence on doctoral students' achievements, especially their PhD theses and other research outcomes, reveals an inconsistent level of training and

	shows that the requirements of the necessary level of qualifications, as described in the MCQ, are not sufficiently met.
	The PhD theses are partly based on a planned topic in accordance with the research or knowledge transfer lines or groups to which the teaching staff belong.
	The methodology used and the training activities developed are partially in line with the learning outcomes. The DAD assessment criteria, research plans and doctoral theses do not enable adequate certification that all the doctoral students have achieved the learning outcomes.
Non-compliant	The documented evidence on the achievements of doctoral students, especially their PhD theses and other research outcomes, reveals a poor level of training, as the requirements of the necessary level of qualifications, as described in the MCQ, are not met.
	The PhD theses are scarcely based on a planned topic in accordance with the research or knowledge transfer lines or groups to which the teaching staff belong.
	There is no clear relationship between the intended learning outcomes and the methodology used and the training activities developed. The DAD assessment criteria, research plans and doctoral theses are not adequate to certify that all doctoral students have achieved the intended learning outcomes.
6.2. The number of PhD theses defended, their duration and the scientific results derived from them are adequate and consistent with the intended training profile.	
Progressing towards excellence	The documentary evidence shows that the time series for the academic indicators is consistent with the types of PhD student and equivalent programmes, and clearly shows continuous enhancement of the PhD programme.
Compliant	The documentary evidence shows that the time series of most of the academic indicators is consistent with the types of PhD student and equivalent programmes, and shows continuous enhancement of the PhD programme.
Compliant with conditions	The documentary evidence shows that there is a certain mismatch in the time series for the academic indicators in relation to the types of PhD student and equivalent programmes, and does not clearly show continuous enhancement of the PhD programme.
Non-compliant	The documentary evidence shows that there is a significant and serious mismatch in the time series for the academic indicators in relation to the types of PhD student and equivalent programmes, and there is no sign of continuous enhancement of the PhD programme.
6.3. PhD students, graduates and faculty are satisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.	

Progressing towards excellence	PhD students, graduates and faculty are very satisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.
Compliant	PhD students, graduates, and faculty are satisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.
Compliant with conditions	The degree of satisfaction of PhD students, graduates and faculty with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results shows some issues that require the definition of an improvement plan.
Non-compliant	PhD students, graduates, and faculty are dissatisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.
6.4. The values for the graduate labour market access indicators are adequate for the characteristics of the PhD programme.	
Progressing towards excellence	The usefulness of the training provided is greater than that of other programmes in the same subject area.
	The employment rate of graduates is much higher than that of the active population for the same reference period and age group, and is higher than that of programmes in the same subject area.
	The rate of suitability for work of graduates is much higher than that of other programmes in the same subject area.
Compliant	The usefulness of the training provided is adequate compared to that of other programmes in the same subject area.
	The employment rate of graduates is higher than that of the active population for the same reference period and age group, and is similar to that of programmes in the same subject area.
	The rate of suitability for work of graduates is similar to that of other programmes in the same subject area.
Compliant with conditions	The usefulness of the training provided is low compared to that of other programmes in the same subject area.
	The employment rate of graduates is close to that of the active population for the same reference period and age group, but is low compared to that of programmes in the same subject area.
	The rate of suitability for work of graduates is low compared to other programmes in the same subject area.

Non-compliant	The usefulness of the training provided falls a long way short of that of other programmes in the same subject area.
	The employment rate of graduates is very low compared to that of the active population for the same reference period and age bracket.
	The rate of suitability for work of graduates is much lower than that of other programmes in the same subject area.
	The PhD programme does not carry out studies on graduates' access to the labour market.

4. ACCREDITATION RESULT

4.1. Final report

The definitive accreditation report (IdA, from the Catalan) issued by CEA shall be prepared using as the primary source of evidence the external visit report (IAE, from the Catalan) prepared by the external assessment committee. The IdA may be favourable or unfavourable and, on the basis of accreditation criteria, the outcome may be placed at four possible levels:

1. Favourable report:
 - a. Accredited progressing towards excellence.
 - b. Accredited.
 - c. Accredited with conditions.
2. Unfavourable report:
 - a. Not accredited.

The IdA must include at least the following:

1. Description of the context of the PhD programme.
2. Description of the procedure used, including the experts involved.
3. Results of the assessment for each of the standards.
4. Final assessment result.
5. Best practices identified.
6. Proposals for improvement (recommendations for follow-up measures).

AQU Catalunya shall send the IdA to the Council of Universities so that it may give accreditation to the study programme under assessment in accordance with the applicable legal procedure.

AQU Catalunya shall publish the accreditation and visit reports on its review reports portal (<http://estudis.aqu.cat/informes>).

4.2. Hallmarks and certificates

If the study programme assessed is awarded a favourable accreditation report, AQU Catalunya will issue a quality hallmark with its own unique number and the corresponding certificate. The hallmark shall be valid for a maximum period of six years.



According to the evaluation made in the final report, study programmes will be awarded a favourable accreditation hallmark (accredited or accredited with conditions) or a hallmark for an accreditation of excellent (accredited progressing towards excellence).

The terms of use are specified in the *AQU Catalunya quality hallmarks and terms of use thereof (Segells de qualitat d'AQU Catalunya i condicions per al seu ús)*, approved by the Board of Management of AQU Catalunya in 2014.

These hallmarks will be published on the University Study Programmes of Catalonia (EUC, from the Catalan) website: <http://estudis.aqu.cat>.

4.3. Effects of accreditation

Accreditation of a PhD programme by the Council of Universities enables the university responsible to continue with its implementation according to the terms set out in the latest verification report for a specific maximum period of six years.

If the Council of Universities does not award accreditation to a study programme, the institution responsible **may not register any new students and will need to embark on all the actions detailed in the validation report in order to gradually phase out the study programme** while adhering to the rights of students already enrolled.

5. FOLLOW-UP AND CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

The follow-up process is cyclical and should be conducted at least every three years in order to coincide regularly with the PhD programme accreditation procedure. The self-assessment report to be prepared by the unit required to submit its programmes to accreditation has the same structure and content as the PhD programme monitoring reports (ISPD, from the Catalan) prepared periodically.

Depending on the outcomes of the assessment AQU Catalunya makes of the ISPDs, the CEA may assess them in successive cycles in order to review how the delivery of the programmes develops and prepare the accreditation thereof. As clearly detailed in the pertinent guidelines relating to the standard for implementing assessment procedures (ESG 2.3) (ENQA, 2015):

“External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.”

In keeping with this assumption and taking into consideration the outcome of the assessment of the follow-up, the goal of AQU Catalunya should be to ensure that the institution swiftly addresses areas with scope for improvement and encourages a spirit of advancement.

With this approach in mind, on a cyclical basis, the unit shall be responsible for performing monitoring and ensuring the continual improvement of the programme monitoring management system pursuant to its own internal management processes. To this end, the unit must report on the situation regarding improvements implemented by means of ISPDs. These reports should also detail changes made as a result of the modifications that may have been required in the monitoring assessment report.

If the institution makes any change to the nature of the programme that could affect the scope or validity of the assessment, this must be specified in the ISPD. In addition, such changes should be reported to AQU Catalunya so it may assess the continued validity of the assessment made.

ANNEX I. SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT TEMPLATE FOR PhD PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

INTRODUCTION

A proposal for a self-assessment report template for PhD programmes is set out in this document with specific guidelines for drafting it. It has the same structure as the ISPDs.

The institution may present the information for accreditation by adapting to the template structure suggested or can adapt the template according to the internal design established. However, in the latter case, it is important for the report to address each of the aspects raised in this guide regardless of the structure.

Self-assessment report for PhD programme accreditation

University	
Name of PhD programme	
RUCT (universities register) code	
Contact details	
Academic coordinator	

Persons responsible for preparing the self-assessment report	
Body responsible for approval	
Date of approval	

1. Programme presentation

Overall perspective of the programme in order to convey a context to the report's readership.

2. Procedure for preparing the self-assessment report

Brief description of the procedure followed in preparing the self-assessment report, highlighting any issues that arose during the process (data collection, etc.) or any diversions from the aspects envisaged in the IQAS.

3. Assessment of the degree of achievement of the standards

In this section the institution should lay down evidence-based reasoning to assess the degree to which the six accreditation standards have been met by the PhD programme. It is desirable for a valuation to be given on the extent to which the PhD programme has reached the standard (progressing towards excellence; compliant; compliant with conditions; non-compliant):

Standard 1: Quality of the training programme

The study programme design (research lines, skills profile and training activities) is current according to the requirements of the educational field and it meets the required level of study according to the MECES.

1.1. The programme has mechanisms in place to ensure that the admission profile of PhD students is suitable and that the number of students is consistent with the characteristics and distribution of the programme's research lines and the number of places available.

1.2. The programme has suitable mechanisms in place for supervision of PhD students and, where applicable, of training activities.

Standard 2: Relevance of public information

The institution appropriately informs all stakeholders of the PhD programme's characteristics and the management processes for quality assurance.

2.1. The HEI publishes truthful, complete, up-to-date and accessible information on the characteristics of the PhD programme, its operational delivery and the outcomes achieved.

2.2. The institution guarantees easy access to relevant information on the PhD programme for all stakeholders, which includes monitoring and, where applicable, accreditation outcomes.

2.3. The HEI publishes the IQAS which forms the framework of the PhD programme.



Standard 3: Efficacy of the internal quality assurance system

The HEI has a functioning internal quality assurance system that has a formal status and assures the quality and continuous enhancement of the PhD programme in an efficient way.

- 3.1. The IQAS implemented facilitates the processes for the design and approval of the PhD programme, its monitoring and its accreditation.
- 3.2. The IQAS implemented ensures information and relevant outcomes are compiled for effective management of the PhD programmes.
- 3.3. The IQAS implemented is reviewed periodically in order to analyse its suitability and, where applicable, an enhancement plan is put forward in order to optimise it.



Standard 4: Suitability of teaching staff

Teaching staff are both sufficient and suitable in accordance with the characteristics of the PhD programme, the scientific field and the number of students.

- 4.1. Teaching staff have accredited research activity.
- 4.2. Teaching staff are sufficient in number and work a suitable number of hours in order to perform their functions.
- 4.3. The PhD programme has suitable actions in place in order to promote thesis supervision and student tutoring.

4.4. The level of involvement of foreign teaching staff and international doctors in monitoring committees and thesis assessment boards is suitable for the scientific field of the programme.

Standard 5: Effectiveness of learning support systems

The physical resources and services needed to deliver the activities envisaged in the PhD programme and for the training of PhD students are sufficient and suitable in accordance with the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the programme.

5.1. The available physical resources are adequate for the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the PhD programme.

5.2. Services available to PhD students provide suitable support to the learning process and encourage access to the labour market.

Standard 6: Quality of (learning) outcomes

The learning outcomes achieved, supported by the doctoral theses and the scientific results derived from them, are consistent with the intended training profile. The quantitative results of the indicators in terms of academic performance, satisfaction and access to the labour market are adequate.

6.1 The learning outcomes achieved correspond to the training objectives set and to the level established in the Catalan Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (MCQ) for PhD programmes.

6.2. The number of PhD theses defended, their duration and the scientific results derived from them are adequate and consistent with the intended training profile.

6.3. PhD students, graduates and faculty are satisfied with the training provided by the PhD programme and its results.

6.3. The values for the graduate labour market indicators are adequate for the characteristics of the PhD programme.

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Assessment and draft enhancement plan

As a result of the analysis of and reflection on the delivery of the PhD programme, an enhancement plan should be put forward.

Diagnosis	Identification of causes	Targets to meet	Proposed actions	Priority	Person responsible	Timeframes	Are changes involved?	Level (programme, unit, univ.)

ANNEX II. DEFINITION OF INDICATORS FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF PhD PROGRAMMES⁹

Whenever possible, the indicators and statistical data should be broken down according to gender to ensure that the programme and the CAE can assess the gender perspective.

Quality of the training programme

Demand: number of applications submitted for admission to a PhD programme.

New incoming students enrolled: number of PhD programme students who have formalised their enrolment for the first time.¹⁰

Total number of students enrolled: total number of students who have formalised their enrolment on a programme in a specific academic year.

Number of places available: number of places available on a PhD programme.

Percentage of students with a scholarship: number of students who have formalised their enrolment on a programme and have been awarded a scholarship to undertake their PhD study programme as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.¹¹

Percentage of foreign students enrolled: number of foreign students who have formalised their enrolment on a programme as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.

Percentage of part-time students enrolled: number of students who have formalised their enrolment on a programme who have been permitted to conduct their thesis project on a part-time basis as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.

Percentage of students who previously undertook Master's programmes at other universities: number of students who did not previously undertake Master's programmes at the same university as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.

Percentage of students according to research line: number of students enrolled in each specific research line of the programme as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.

Percentage of students according to admission requirements: number of students enrolled who needed bridging courses as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled on the programme.

⁹ These indicators should be calculated for each academic year although in order to analyse them they may be grouped into the periods deemed suitable (3 years for monitoring and 6 for accreditation).

¹⁰ Students that have been accepted but are not enrolled due to taking bridging courses, for instance, are not included.

¹¹ Only the following scholarships have been taken into consideration for undertaking a PhD: research staff training, university staff training, novice research staff grants, each university's own scholarships, Erasmus Mundus, industrial PhDs and ITNs.

Suitability of teaching staff

Number of defended thesis supervisors: number of supervisors that have supervised theses that have been defended within the programme.

Percentage of defended thesis supervisors with sexennials in progress: number of sexennials secured by supervisors of theses that have been defended within the programme over the past six years as a percentage of the number of potential applicants (civil servant and non-civil servant teaching and research staff, teaching staff of private universities).¹²

Effectiveness of learning support systems

Satisfaction of PhD students with the study programme: number of students who place themselves in each level of satisfaction included in the survey on satisfaction as a percentage of the total number of students who responded to the survey.

Satisfaction of thesis supervisors with the study programme: number of thesis supervisors who place themselves in each level of satisfaction included in the survey on satisfaction as a percentage of the total number of thesis supervisors who responded to the survey.

Quality of (learning) outcomes

Average duration of the PhD programme when studied full-time:¹³ average number of courses followed by full-time students who have defended their thesis since originally enrolling on the programme.

Average duration of the PhD programme when studied part-time:¹⁴ average number of courses followed by part-time students who have defended their thesis since originally enrolling on the programme.

Number of scientific outcomes of PhD theses: number of scientific contributions stemming from the PhD theses defended within the programme, including papers in indexed journals, books, book chapters, artistic and cultural production, and patents.

¹² In the assessment of this indicator it is necessary to bear in mind programmes where the number of potential applicants is very low (i.e.: the health field, fields with many RyC or ICREA directors, etc.).

¹³ Excluding the periods defined in Royal Decree RD 99/2011 (maternity, illness, etc.).

¹⁴ Excluding the periods defined in Royal Decree RD 99/2011 (maternity, illness, etc.).

Number of defended theses on the context of full-time study: total number of theses defended by students on the PhD programme studying full-time.

Number of defended theses on the context of part-time study: total number of theses defended by students on the PhD programme who have been permitted to study part-time.

Study programme drop-out percentage: number of students during an academic year that have neither formalised their enrolment on the programme they were following nor defended their thesis as a percentage of the total number of students that could have enrolled again in said academic year.

Percentage of students on the PhD programme that have undertaken research stays: number of students on the PhD programme that have undertaken research stays lasting more than 3 months at research centres or other universities as a percentage of the total number of students on the programme.

Percentage of doctors with an international mention: number of students during an academic year that have defended their thesis and who, according to the regulations, have obtained the international mention for their qualification as a percentage of the total number of students that defended their thesis during said academic year.

Rate of suitability of work in relation to the study programme: number of doctors from the programme's academic field who are performing PhD-level functions as a percentage of the total number in work.

Employment rate:¹⁵ number of persons in work as a percentage of the total number of doctors qualifying in the programme field.

¹⁵ Although the aim is to obtain indicators for each programme, at present AQU Catalunya's survey on access to the labour market solely provides the rates in the educational field for each university. The programme-specific rates need to be used where available.

ANNEX III. SPECIFICATIONS OF THE CATALAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (CHE-QF) FOR LEVEL 4

Level 4 (PhD) of the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education corresponds to **level 8** of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the **third cycle level** of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Level 4 comprises a single rating: PhD. PhD programmes have a maximum duration of three years' full-time dedication (from admission to the programme to delivery of the PhD thesis), although the programme's Academic Committee may authorise an extension of two more years. However, PhD studies can be done part-time; in this case, the duration of the programme is extended to five years.

This qualification must be designed and accredited in such a way as to demonstrate to graduates that they have achieved the learning outcomes specified in the criteria for level 4 and in the descriptors for the PhD.

CHE-QF CRITERIA FOR LEVEL 4 OF MECES (REORGANISED)	
Objective	<i>Graduates at this level must have a systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of study and demonstrate specialised research ability for the progress of learning and/or professional practice.</i>
Knowledge	At this level, graduates must have acquired advanced knowledge at the frontier of information and demonstrate, in the context of internationally recognised scientific research, a detailed and comprehensive understanding of one or more areas of research, based on the theoretical and practical aspects of scientific methodology.
Skills	At this level, graduates must: have shown that they are able to design a research project to critically analyse and assess inaccurate situations and apply their knowledge, contributions and methods, in a synthesis of new and complex ideas to deepen the understanding of the research context in which they work; have made a significant original contribution to scientific research in their field of knowledge recognised as such by the international scientific community; have shown in their specific scientific context that they are able to make progress in cultural, social and technological aspects, as well as foster innovation in all areas of the knowledge society.

Competencies	<p>At this level, graduates must:</p> <p>have shown that they are able to carry out their research activities in a socially responsible way and with scientific integrity;</p> <p>have developed sufficient autonomy to manage and lead innovative research teams and projects and national or international scientific collaborations within their field, in multidisciplinary contexts and, where appropriate, with a strong element of knowledge transfer;</p> <p>have justified their ability to take part in scientific debates that arise on an international scale in their field of knowledge, and to disseminate the results of their research to all types of audiences.</p>
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PhD degree

The aim is to acquire advanced training in research techniques. To obtain this doctoral degree you must have passed a period of training and research, called a PhD programme. This programme includes the preparation and presentation of a doctoral thesis, which consists of an original piece of research.

QUALIFICATION LEVEL DESCRIPTOR FOR THE PhD DEGREE	
Objective	<i>PhD qualifies people who apply an important set of knowledge to research and the development of new knowledge in one or more fields of research, study or professional practice.</i>
Knowledge	<p><i>Types of knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Show understanding of an important set of knowledge that is at the forefront of an academic discipline or a professional field and/or at the point of articulation between different areas of knowledge, scientific fields or professional fields. ■ Possess knowledge acquired from research or personal work that contributes significantly to the development of a professional and scientific field. <p><i>Depth, breadth and diversity of knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Show a detailed understanding of the complexities of a field of study, including the requirements for making further progress. ■ Show that the boundaries of knowledge and the ability to extend them in one or more academic disciplines or in a professional context are identified.
Skills	<p><i>Cognitive skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Possess a critical perspective of the scientific or professional field, including a critical understanding of the most relevant current theories, principles and concepts.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Possess and use the cognitive skills and intellectual independence needed to think critically, evaluate existing knowledge and ideas, conduct systematic research, and reflect on theory and practice to generate original knowledge. <p><i>Creative skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be able to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise when creating new and complex ideas and tangible results. ■ Be able to generate original knowledge and interpretations to make relevant contributions to a discipline, area or professional field. <p><i>Problem solving</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be able to identify and analyse complex problems in professional practice, the area of knowledge or scientific field, and to contribute to solving them in a tactical, strategic and creative way. <p>Technical and practical skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Possess the ability to conceive, design, apply and adapt a significant research/development process with academic integrity. ■ Be able to develop, adapt and apply research methodologies to expand and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice. ■ Recognise the limitations of existing knowledge in professional practice, the area of knowledge or scientific field at the point of articulation between the different professions or areas of knowledge and take measures to deal with them. ■ Show judgement when addressing complex areas of expertise, often without having complete data but at the same time taking into account broader social (and ethical) responsibilities. <p><i>Information/communication skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be able to participate in scientific debates in the specific area of knowledge and to disseminate research results to all types of audiences. ■ Know how to use information from specialised and unique sources of documentation, not only from scientific journals but also from corporate publications and national and international organisations.
<p>Competencies</p>	<p><i>Learning environment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have the ability to conceive, design, apply and adapt an important research/development process with academic integrity. ■ Show the skills and qualities needed to continue making progress on the front line of the specialist area in a self-directed and autonomous way. ■ Be able to promote, in academic and professional contexts, the technological, cultural or social progress of the knowledge society. ■ Be able to work on a research team with peers. ■ Be able to carry out academic and research work that is socially responsible, and with intellectual honesty and scientific integrity.

Professional environment

- Communicate with colleagues, specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients, the scientific community in general and society as a whole in a way that is specific and appropriate to the context, using the conventions of professional practice.
- Act autonomously in complex and unpredictable situations that occur in professional or similar environments, and work in an ethically responsible way.
- Work with specialists and non-specialists, supervisors and clients.
- Assume responsibility with regard to the results of their own or other people's study or work, and the professional development of people and groups.

ANNEX IV. CONSULTATION PROCESS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

This methodological guide has been subject to consultation with the following stakeholders, whose views and remarks have been taken into account:

- 1. Vice-rectors for quality**
 - a. 17.07.2017 – Presentation and discussion on the *Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes*.
 - b. 23.11.2017 – Presentation and discussion on the remarks received during the public consultation on the *Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes*.
- 2. PhD school directors**
 - a. 06.10.2017 – Meeting with Catalan PhD school directors to discuss the *Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes*.
- 3. Technical quality units**
 - a. 14.09.2017 – Presentation and discussion on the *Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes*.
- 4. Public consultation with the academic community**
 - a. From 20.07.2017 to 31.10.2017 – Public consultation with teaching staff, students, academic managers, etc., via the AQU Catalunya website.



Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
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