



AQU CATALUNYA

# GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING THE STUDENT REPORT FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF DEGREES AND UNIVERSITY CENTRES





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## ACCREDITATION OF DEGREE PROGRAMMES AND UNIVERSITY CENTRES

When the Catalan Higher Education System joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the structures in place to date were modified and the Catalan universities began the process of adopting a system of easily understandable and comparable degrees at European level, based on three cycles (Bachelor, Master and PhD), establishing the comparable credit system (ECTS) and promoting European cooperation to guarantee quality and develop equivalent assessment criteria and methodologies.

AQU Catalunya designed and developed the [VSMA Framework](#) for the development of assessment methodologies, in accordance with the European context and the applicable legal regulations, for the validation of new degree programmes (ex-ante assessment), the monitoring of their deployment, the assessment of any modifications that may be made to them and the cyclical accreditation of courses.

Under this framework, accreditation is the corroboration that the degree programme is being developed as planned in the validation process and that the expected results are being achieved, based on an assessment that includes an external visit by a committee of experts.

All official university degrees must go through the [accreditation process](#) before six years, counting from the date of implementation or the last accreditation (eight years in the case of 300 and 360 ECTS degrees).

On the other hand, university centres that have obtained a [certification](#) seal of their internal systems for quality assurance (IQAs) and have at least 50% of their accredited degrees can apply for the centre's first [institutional accreditation](#). In this case, all of the centre's degree programmes are automatically accredited, and the centre must renew its institutional accreditation by passing an assessment process with an external visit by a committee of experts every six years.

## THE STUDENT REPORT

### Student participation in the accreditation processes

The student body has a significant participation in the accreditation processes at AQU Catalunya. In the self-assessment phase, the assessed centres set up an internal committee in which students must be actively represented. The effective participation of the student body in this self-assessment committee (CAI, *comitè d'avaluació interna* in Catalan) and in the various decision-making bodies of the centre contributes to demonstrating the institution's culture of quality. The CAI is tasked with preparing a self-Assessment report, for which it collects data and evidence, including information on student satisfaction with the training received and with relation to other aspects, such as satisfaction with teaching, services or the quality of job placement.

Later, in the external assessment phase, AQU Catalunya includes students in the external assessment committees (CAE, *comitè d'avaluació externa* in Catalan), which carry out the analysis of the information provided by the assessed institution and the visit to the centre. The student of the committee acts as a full member, with voice and vote, at the same level as the rest of the members that make it up.

During the visit to the centre, the CAE interviews the main stakeholders involved in the training process, including a representative of the student body and a representative of recent graduates.

The visit report drawn up by the CAE is sent to a [specific commission](#) (CEA, *comissió específica d'avaluació* in Catalan) of AQU Catalunya and serves as the main evidence for the CEA to issue the accreditation report for the degrees or the centre undergoing the process, so that the Council of Universities takes the final decision on accreditation or the renewal of institutional accreditation. A student is also a full member of these committees.

### Approach and characteristics of the student report

Despite the presence of students throughout the entire process, there is often the perception that the representativeness of the group before accreditation processes can be conditioned by the greater or lesser strength of the participation structures and student representation at the centre, the possible difficulties in finding students for the hearings and the level of knowledge of the group about the quality mechanisms.

The AQU Catalunya Student Advisory Committee, in agreement with the Catalan University Student Council (CEUCAT), has agreed to activate a student reporting procedure that reflects international experiences considered to be best practice in the field of quality assurance in order to address this challenge and to enhance the participation of this group in accreditation processes.



For each accreditation process conducted by AQU Catalunya, the aim is to promote **the drafting of an independent report by the student body on the degree programmes or centres to be accredited**, to accompany, as complementary evidence, the accreditation self-report drawn up by the self-assessment committee. This evidence does not in any case replace the participation of the student body in the internal phase of the assessment, nor in the external phase.

This initiative is proposed at a time when both AQU Catalunya and the Catalan universities have achieved sufficient experience in these assessment processes and when almost all of the university centres in Catalonia have passed at least one degree programme accreditation cycle.

The general characteristics of this report are as follows:

- > It is a document drawn up, approved and issued by the students with complete independence from the management teams of the centres and the university.
- > It collects the opinion and satisfaction of the student body on aspects that are the subject of the assessment.
- > It is based on data and information obtained through the application of appropriate and relevant qualitative and quantitative methodologies:
  - The data is collected *ad hoc* by the students themselves in order to draft the report.
  - The data is generated by the university or centre's internal quality assurance system.
  - The data are available through verified and reliable data platforms (such as EUC Estudis).

Together with this guideline document, the document *Student Report for Accreditation Template* is provided for those who will be in charge of the coordination of the Student Report for Accreditation for their guidance in the process of drafting the Student Report for Accreditation. The template includes a proposal for specific quality dimensions to structure the report:

1. Management and organisation of the degree (degree programme accreditation) or training policy of the centre (institutional accreditation)
2. Teaching, learning and assessment
3. Compulsory internship
4. Bachelor's final thesis / Master's final thesis (TFG/TFM)
5. Learning support resources and services
6. Academic environment and participation

## PROCEDURE

Every year, the universities and AQU Catalunya jointly plan external visits based on the degrees and centres that have to start the accreditation process. More than a year in advance, the Agency's Governing Council approves the visit calendar, and the universities begin the process of drawing up the self-assessment reports, as the first step in the accreditation process.

As established in the accreditation procedures, two months before the date of the visit the university must present the documentation to AQU Catalunya, so that the external assessment committees can analyse the self-assessment report and evidence. As for the student report, the deadlines for its drafting and presentation must coincide with the deadlines set for the self-assessment report.

A coordinator must be appointed from among the students of the degree courses or the centre to be accredited, or a report coordination group must be set up. This assignment should include profiles of students who hold representative positions and who have a track record within the institution (who have completed more than half of their degree, graduates from the same institution who are studying for a master's degree, etc.). In the event that the students in the coordination group do not have previous experience in drafting this type of report, AQU Catalunya will provide initial training.

The drafting of the student report must progress in parallel with that of the self-assessment report. Once the report has been finalised, a final period of public exposure to the group of students of the degree programmes or the centre assessed may be established, after which the drafting team will consider the possible contributions received in order to assess whether to include them in the report. Once the final version of the report is available, the closing date and the signature of the people who coordinated its preparation must be included.

## COLLECTION OF INFORMATION, DRAFTING AND SENDING OF THE REPORT

The students who carry out the coordination and writing of the report must have enough data and information from the opinion of the group on the aspects that are the subject of assessment. Two types of necessary information are distinguished:

- a) Information and context data
- b) Student satisfaction

### Information and context data

Information (especially quantitative) on aspects such as access, teaching staff, academic performance, drop-out rates, labour market insertion and student satisfaction is necessary in order to be able to analyse the situation of the degree programmes or the institution to be accredited. This information is generated by the internal quality assurance system of the university or centre and is largely public for the university's or centre's stakeholders. In addition to the universities' internal sources, external data sources can be used, such as the [EUC Estudis](#) portal. As well as offering data on the degrees that are assessed, the portal's resources make it possible to compare this information with the situation of similar degrees and of the Catalan higher education system as a whole.

You can also take into account all that information (in this case, qualitative) derived from previous assessment processes that the degree or centre has passed and that has been published on the [EUC Informes portal](#) from AQU Catalunya. This will allow students to have information on any requirements or recommendations from the external assessment committees. It is worth indicating how this information can be consulted from the Agency, through the initial training of the students in charge of drafting the report.

### Student body satisfaction

The most relevant information for the drafting of the students' report is that which refers to the opinion of the group on the aspects that are the subject of the assessment.

Beyond the institutional mechanisms established for the collection of satisfaction on multiple elements of the learning process (which must also be subject to analysis), the people responsible for coordinating and drafting the report **can collect *ad hoc* information, all applying appropriate and relevant methodologies according to each case.**

Among the proposed methodologies are the most commonly used qualitative data collection techniques, such as focus groups or individual interviews. It is also possible to design and carry out a survey to find out satisfaction about some specific aspect, especially in the case of large groups. During the initial training, the students in charge of preparing the report should have access to examples of methodologies used in previous reports (with due anonymisation of data).

The selection of the methodology by the students drafting the report must consider the reality of their centre (size, number of degrees, etc.), with the aim that the opinions collected are as representative as possible. To this end, students' opinions should be obtained from all the degrees that are accredited or, in the case of institutional accreditation, from the different Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the centre. The report should always reflect the general characteristics (e.g. number of persons, degree(s) and year(s)) of the students who have been asked for feedback (they do not need to be individually identified), as well as the data collection technique(s) used.

## Drafting of the report

The assessments or information included in the student report must be based on evidence or sources identified in the same report that correspond to the two types of information described:

- a) Quantitative and qualitative data of the degree programmes and the centre.
- b) Information or opinions that are representative of the satisfaction of the group (generated through the institutional mechanisms for collecting satisfaction and/or obtained expressly for the preparation of this report).

As mentioned above, the source of the data or the origin of the opinions must be explained (information collection technique used and general characteristics of the participants, without individual identification). The external assessment committee cannot consider any comment or assessment whose origin or evidence that supports it cannot be clearly identified.

The information collected in the report must be treated confidentially by all internal and external people linked to the assessment (report drafting team, managers of the assessed centre, external assessment committee, etc.). Both the staff of AQU Catalunya and the members of the external assessment committees must sign the document of confidentiality and commitment to the [Ethical Code of the Agency](#) and follow what is established there.

According to the principle of confidentiality, the version of the report provided at the assessed centre should omit the identification of the persons who drafted the report, as well as information about the students who participated in the *ad hoc* collection of information (general characteristics of the persons who provided feedback through a survey, focus groups, etc.).

AQU Catalunya can only use the information collected for the purpose of carrying out degree programme or centre accreditation identified in the report, as well as for the review and improvement of the methodology and the drafting process of this report. The student group responsible for drafting the report is recommended to destroy the collected documentation once the process has ended.

## Report submission

Once signed by the people who coordinated the student report, **the document must be sent directly to AQU Catalunya**, to the email address **qualitat@aqu.cat** (indicating in the subject **"accreditation student report", the name of the centre and the university**). The Agency makes the student report available to the external assessment committee, as complementary evidence to the self-report for the accreditation process. It is also necessary to send a copy of the student report to the university, with the anonymisation of data indicated in the previous section (after sending the centre's self-report to AQU Catalunya and before the date of the external visit).

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