



AQU CATALUNYA

OFFICIAL UNIVERSITY DEGREE VALIDATION AND MODIFICATION PROCEDURE

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Approved by the Institutional and Programme Review Commission on 27 November 2023
Procedure comes into effect: starting from the call for validations and modifications in 2024.

First edition: December 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

The regulatory framework establishes that official university degrees must undergo external assessment procedures in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), with the aim of ensuring its quality.

The external assessment body responsible for processing the quality assurance procedures in the Catalan Higher Education System is the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya). This function is exercised by the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and its specific assessment commissions.

Curriculum validation is a prerequisite for the initial accreditation of the degree and its registration in the Register of Universities, Centres and Qualifications (RUCT) (Registro de Universidades, Centros y Títulos in Spanish). Proposals for changes to existing official degrees must undergo a prior assessment process called modification. The Council of Universities (Consejo de Universidades in Spanish) is the competent authority in charge of verifying and modifying official degree programmes based on the mandatory and binding assessment report issued by AQU Catalunya.

Depending on the nature and magnitude of the proposed changes in the official university degrees, the modifications are classified into two types:

- > **Non-substantial modifications:** Minor changes that enhance the degree and that arise from the monitoring that each centre carries out with the frequency established in its internal quality assurance system.
- > **Substantial modifications:** Changes which enhance the degree and which also arise from monitoring or requirements derived from previous assessment processes, but which go beyond the scope of non-substantial modification, as they alter structural features, the nature and/or the objectives of the degree programme or other aspects of the report.

1.1. Procedure scope

This procedure is applicable to the validation and modification of official degrees, master's degrees and Phd/doctoral programmes. This procedure is not applicable to the validation and modification of joint international degrees that follow the methodology of the European Approach, nor to the validation and modification of higher artistic education. The same applies to institutionally accredited centres that wish to introduce non-substantial modifications to their official degrees.

Table 1 shows the details of the assessment guides where this procedure is applied.

Table 1. Applicable procedure assessment guides

<u>Guide to the design, validation and modification of recognised bachelor's and master's degree programmes</u>	Proposals for the official Bachelor's and Master's degrees
<u>Guide to the formulation and validation of proposals for recognised doctorate programmes</u>	Proposals for the official Phd/doctoral programs

In addition to the guides, other methodological documentation that applies to the validation and modification processes should also be taken into account, which can be found in the [Validation and Modification Methodology](#) section on the AQU Catalunya website.

1.2. Procedure structure

This document is divided into the following sections: the effects and results of validation and substantial modification, the assessment procedure itself, how to deal with non-substantial modifications, the publication of assessment reports and quality labels and, finally, how monitoring and continuous enhancement will be carried out. In addition, the annex to the document contains the assessment procedure change log.

The assessment guides and the assessment procedure form an integrated assessment model aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015).

2. VALIDATION AND SUBSTANTIAL MODIFICATION EFFECTS AND RESULTS

2.1. Validation and substantial modification effects

2.1.1. Validation effects

Validation of an official university degree by the Council of Universities entails its initial accreditation and allows it to be authorised by the Generalitat de Catalunya for teaching. The university in charge may continue to offer the degree, in accordance with the terms established in the validation report, for a maximum period that depends on the type of course (see Table 2).

Table 2. Degree accreditation renewal deadline

Official degree	Maximum deadline for renewal of accreditation
Degree of 240 credits	6 years
Degree of 300 and 360 credits	8 years
University Master's degree	6 years
Phd/Doctoral programme	6 years

If the Council of Universities does not verify a degree, the institution responsible will not be able to offer the studies on an official basis.

2.1.2. Substantial modification effects

Once the substantial modification has been definitively approved, it will take effect in accordance with the implementation schedule provided in the amended report.

2.2. Assessment results

Assessment results for the validation and substantial modification of curricula shall be expressed as **favourable** or **unfavourable**.

3. VALIDATION AND SUBSTANTIAL MODIFICATION ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

3.1. University programming planning¹

The Government of the Generalitat de Catalunya and the universities agree on an annual basis on the official degree programmes that may be implemented two academic years after passing the validation process at the Inter-University Council of Catalonia. AQU Catalunya is entrusted with the task of assessing the degree programmes included in the university.

3.2. Validation and substantial modification application

Universities must submit validation and substantial modification proposals to the Council of Universities, as established in the AQU Catalunya [call for applications schedule](#), via the [online application](#) provided by the Ministry of Universities.

For degrees submitted by non-institutionally accredited institutions, the Council of Universities shall review the documentation provided and accept the application if it complies with the established requirements. Once the application has been accepted, it is sent to AQU Catalunya.

For degrees submitted by institutionally accredited institutions, the curriculum report is sent jointly to the General Secretariat for Universities and AQU Catalunya's processing department.

3.3. Assessment

3.3.1. Individual assessment

A validation or substantial modification proposal is assigned to the relevant specific assessment committee (hereinafter referred to as the specific committee), which assesses it in accordance with the standards and criteria set out in the corresponding assessment guide. This assessment result is agreed upon in the plenary session of the specific committee.

¹ It is only applicable to the validation of new official degrees.

3.3.2. Assessment report drafting

The specific committees draft the assessment report based on a model that, in addition to the corresponding motivation, includes the following aspects:

Best practices

Noteworthy aspects of the degree that can be transferred to other degrees.

Requirements

Very serious deficiencies in the degree design that led to the issuing of a prior report.

They may be subject to an appeal by the University.

Enhancement areas

Deficiencies detected that must be resolved within a maximum period of three years. They are important, but not serious enough to issue a prior report.

They may be subject to an appeal by the University.

Recommendations

Suggestions to promote better degree design. Implementation of the recommendations is not mandatory.

They are not the subject of an appeal by the university.

The members of the specific committee agree on the content of the assessment report in plenary session and, subsequently, the president of the committee signs off the report.

3.4. Decision

The specific committees, created by agreement of AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), are responsible for assessing degrees to verify, monitor and modify official degrees. In this way, the knowledge acquired throughout the assessment processes is guaranteed across the lifecycle of the degree programmes. Its main function is to issue validation and modification reports for the degrees that undergo the process, so that the Council of Universities can make the final decision. More information on the functions and composition of the assessment bodies can be found on the [AQU Catalunya website](#).

Specific committees will prepare validation and substantial modification reports. These reports will be issued as a final report or a preliminary report. AQU Catalunya will only issue a preliminary report before the final report.

The institution may, **within fifteen working days**, submit remarks on the preliminary report for the ad hoc committee to take them into consideration. The remarks must resolve those aspects that the specific committee has indicated in its preliminary report. Once the specific committee has assessed the new proposal and has analysed whether the possible shortcomings detected have been corrected, it will draw up the final report to verify or substantially modify it.

3.5. Issuing validation or substantial modification reports and communication

AQU Catalunya will communicate the result of the validation or substantial modification to the university, the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Ministry of Universities and the Council of Universities.

The deadline for issuing the final reports is six months in the case of degrees submitted by centres not institutionally accredited, and four months in the case of degrees submitted by institutionally accredited centres.

Should the deadline for issuing the report be postponed, in accordance with the applicable regulations (article 22d of Law 39/2015, of 1 October, on the common administrative procedure for public administrations), AQU Catalunya will notify the university. If the postponement of the maximum time limit for issuing the report is applied, the time limit may not exceed nine months in the case of non-institutionally accredited centres, and seven months in the case of institutionally accredited centres.

3.6. Register

Once the Council of Universities has verified the curriculum, and after the autonomous community has issued the corresponding authorisation, the degree's official status will be established by agreement of the Council of Ministers, following a proposal by the Head of the Ministry of Universities, and will be published in the *Spanish Official State Gazette* (BOE). Subsequently, the degree will be registered in the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT).

Once the official status and validity of the degree has been established, the rector of the corresponding university shall order the publication of the syllabus in the *Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia* (DOGC). The university then has a maximum of two academic years to implement and start teaching the degree that has been verified. If this is not done, the degree will lose its initial accreditation.

Should the accepted modifications affect the name of the degree included in the resolution of validation of the curriculum report, or significantly affect the teaching structure in the

terms established in annex II of Spanish Royal Decree 822/2021, the curriculum will be published, in accordance with the aforementioned provisions for validation.

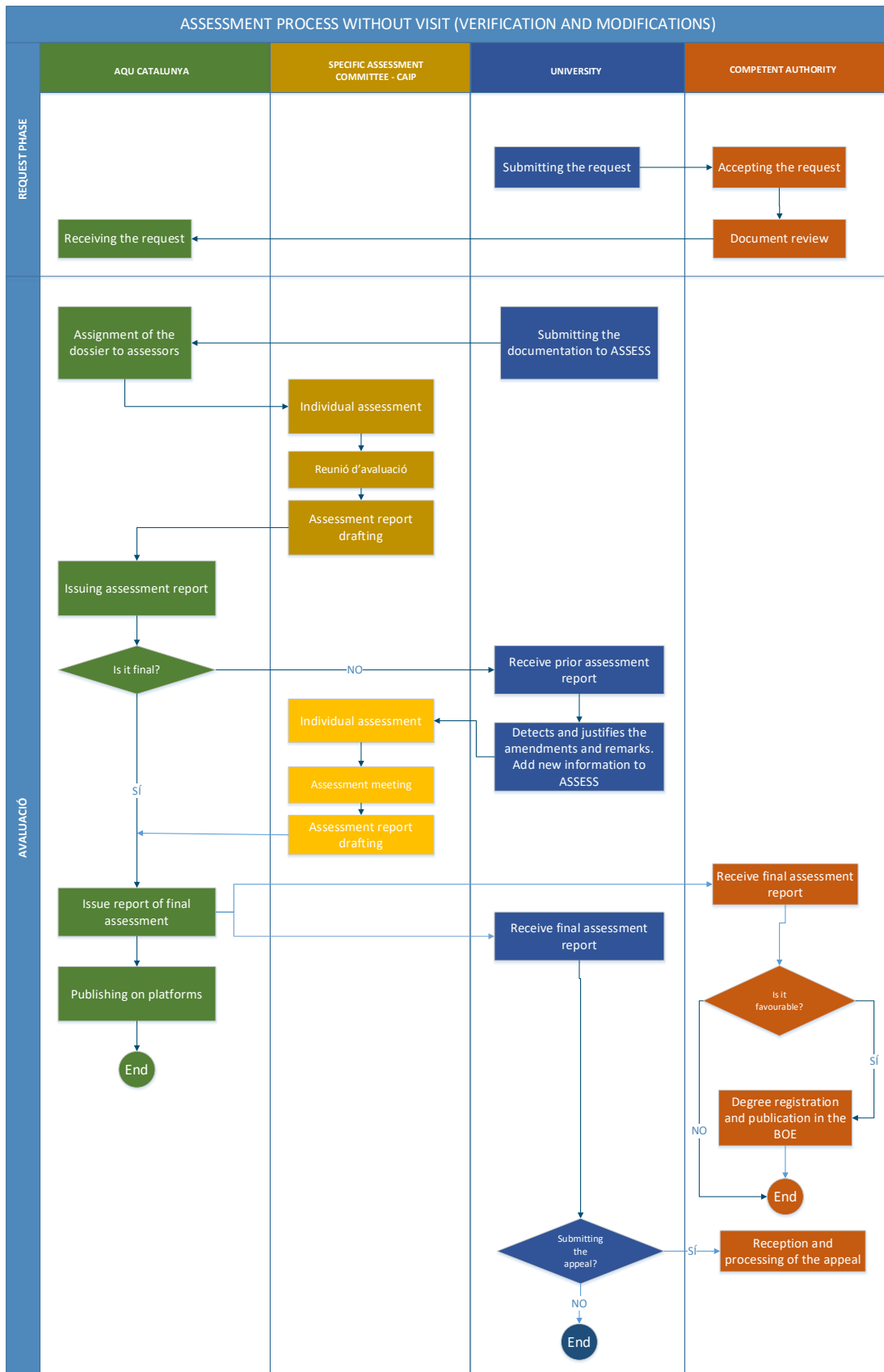
3.7. Review report

In the event that the university does not agree with the results of the final assessment report, it may lodge an appeal against the outcome with the chair of the Council of Universities no later than ten working days after notification. If the appeal is accepted for processing, the Council of Universities may refer it to AQU Catalunya so that the Appeals Commission can analyse the file and issue the corresponding review report to the University Council, in accordance with the DOGC published on the AQU Catalunya website.

The AQU Catalunya Appeals Commission is responsible for issuing review reports of other acts issued by the commissions when this is established in the assessment, certification and accreditation processes.

3.8. Flowchart

Below is the diagram of the assessment process for validation and modification:



4. NON-SUBSTANTIAL MODIFICATIONS

Specific details of the non-substantial modification procedure for non-institutionally accredited institutions are described below.

An [application for a non-substantial modification](#) must be submitted by the university through EACAT, together with a favourable report from its internal quality assurance system (IQAS), ensuring that there are no changes in the nature, objectives and fundamental characteristics of the degree, and that the provisions of the corresponding AQU Catalunya guide have been followed.

Where appropriate, the Agency shall issue a decision on the acceptance of the non-substantial modification by the chair of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), which is delegated with this function.

If AQU Catalunya finds that some of the proposed changes involve a change in the nature, objectives or fundamental characteristics of the degree programme, it shall reject the application submitted and, if appropriate, warn the university about the consequences in terms of IQAS implementation. Furthermore, AQU Catalunya will notify the competent bodies to authorise the degree programme in cases where the modification initially proposed as non-substantial is of particular relevance and is not substantial.

5. PUBLICATION AND SEALS

Validation and substantial modification reports will be published on the [AQU Catalunya report website](#) and on the [Database of External Quality Assurance Results](#) of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education).

AQU Catalunya generates the [quality labels and certificates](#) for the validation process, as approved by the AQU Catalunya Governing Board. The modification process does not involve any seal or certificate. More information on seals and quality certificates can be consulted on the [University Studies of Catalonia](#) website.

6. MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS ENHANCEMENT

Although internal to the institution, monitoring is a compulsory process, and the resulting reports are some of the main evidence in the future accreditation process. AQU Catalunya will assess the monitoring of those degrees whose report for validation or modification included enhancement areas.

The monitoring of the official degrees that are taught in institutionally accredited centres will be carried out in the scope of the monitoring of the institutional accreditation process.

The process of monitoring the development of degrees involves a reflection on the same six elements that will form part of the future accreditation process. In this way, the process of monitoring the degrees becomes the basis for the subsequent accreditation.

ANNEX I. CHANGE LOG

The *Guide to the design, validation and modification of recognised bachelor's and master's degree programmes*, from the first edition (January 2011) to the sixth edition (November 2021), includes the assessment procedure.

The *Guide to the design, validation and modification of recognised bachelor's and master's degree programmes* (April 2022) - revised after the publication of Spanish Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance - does not include the assessment procedure, which is presented separately in this document.

The main changes that have been introduced in this edition are the following:

- > A section on the scope and structure of the procedure is included.
- > The sections are reordered.
- > The procedure is adapted to the requirements of Spanish Royal Decree 822/2021.
- > The concepts of *best practices*, *requirements*, *enhancement areas* and *recommendations* are redefined, standardising them with the rest of the degree and centre assessment processes.
- > Information on non-substantial modifications in centres which are not institutionally accredited is included.
- > An annex with the change log is added.

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency

December 2023 · METAQU-022-2023



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