



PROCEDURE

Follow-up of Recognised University Degree Programmes

First edition

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1. INTRODUCTION

The regulatory framework requires higher education institutions to continuously monitor and periodically review their degree programmes to ensure that they achieve their stated objectives and meet the needs of students and society. This follow-up must be carried out in accordance with the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG) to ensure the quality of these programmes.

Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university education and its quality assurance procedure¹ (hereinafter, Royal Decree 822/2021), provides the regulatory framework for aligning all recognised university degree programmes with the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Royal Decree 99/2011,² meanwhile, regulates recognised PhD programmes.

The follow-up of recognised university degree programmes forms part of the [Framework for Enhancing the Institutional Quality of the Catalan Higher Education System](#) (QUALINS Framework), approved by the Governing Board on 2 April 2025, which adopts a risk-based approach. In this context, external quality assurance processes foster the use of risk analysis as a tool for quality enhancement. Universities, for their part, analyse risks within their internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) in order to mitigate them and ensure that students receive a high-quality education.

The external review body responsible for conducting quality assurance procedures in the Catalan Higher Education System (HES) is the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya). It performs this function through the [Institutional and Programme Review Commission](#) (CAIP) and its specific review commissions.

1.1. Scope of the procedure

This procedure applies to the follow-up of recognised bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD programmes delivered by university centres that do not hold institutional accreditation. The scope and level of scrutiny of the external review are adjusted according to previous review reports, requirements, enhancement areas, outcome indicators and risk

¹ [Royal Decree 822/2021](#), of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university education and its quality assurance procedure.

² [Royal Decree 99/2022](#), of 28 January, regulating recognised PhD programmes.

factors. At institutionally accredited centres, programme follow-up forms part of the centre's institutional accreditation follow-up, although individual degree programmes may still be monitored separately where there are risks or evidence that justify it.

Table 1 sets out the aspects to be assessed as part of the follow-up procedure and the corresponding review guides.

Table 1. Review guides that apply the procedure and aspects covered by the review

Reference documents	Aspects covered by the review*
Validation Guide to the Design, Validation and Modification of Recognised Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes Guide to the Design, Validation and Modification of Recognised PhD Programmes	All enhancement areas and requirements identified in validation review reports.
Modification Guide to the Design, Validation and Modification of Recognised Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes Guide to the Design, Validation and Modification of Recognised PhD Programmes	Areas for enhancement and requirements explicitly identified by the specific review commission in modification review reports.
Accreditation Guide to the Accreditation of University Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes Guide to the Accreditation of Recognised PhD Programmes	Degree programmes accredited with conditions: all enhancement areas and requirements identified in dimensions rated as conditional in degree programme accreditation reports.

Reference documents	Aspects covered by the review*
Accreditation of international joint programmes using the European Approach Guide to the Accreditation of Joint Programmes using the European Approach	All enhancement areas and requirements identified in European Approach reviews.
International accreditation of medical degrees Guide to the Accreditation of Medical Study Programmes According to the AQU Catalunya Standards and the WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement: Basic Medical Education	All enhancement areas and requirements identified in accreditation reports, for both institutionally accredited and non-institutionally accredited centres.

* Enhancement areas relating to descriptive, administrative or regulatory matters at university level are not covered by the review. This does not affect the institution's responsibility to consider them and incorporate them into its internal continuous enhancement plan.

This procedure does not apply to the follow-up of arts higher education programmes.

Recommendations included in external review reports – that is, suggestions made by external review panels that institutions are not required to implement – may be taken into account as part of the continuous enhancement of the degree programme.

1.2. Structure of the procedure

This document is divided into the following sections: the purpose and outcome of follow-up, the review procedure itself and the publication of follow-up reports.

2. PURPOSE AND OUTCOME OF FOLLOW-UP

2.1. Purpose of the review

The follow-up of recognised degree programmes is essential for demonstrating progress in continuous enhancement. Universities are responsible for internally follow-up their own programmes. AQU Catalunya, for its part, takes a risk-based approach to follow-up quality, focusing on the enhancement areas and requirements specified in [Table 1](#).

Follow-up has two main purposes:

- To provide universities with a useful management tool for assessing the delivery of their degree programmes through the analysis of data and indicators; and
- To contribute to continuous enhancement.

2.2. Outcome of follow-up

AQU Catalunya's follow-up review procedure does not review ratings assigned to standards, dimensions or accreditation levels, as it adopts a review approach focused on continuous enhancement.

External review reports resulting from programme follow-up constitute key evidence for subsequent external reviews.

AQU Catalunya will inform the competent authorities if any serious breaches of the commitments set out in the degree programme specification are identified, in accordance with Royal Decree 822/2021.³

3. REVIEW PROCEDURE

3.1. Planning

Each year, AQU Catalunya works with the Catalan universities to draw up a proposed schedule of the degree programmes to undergo follow-up the following year, based on quality-related risks. Follow-up reports are submitted between December of the current year and February of the following year.

Follow-up associated with the different review processes takes place three years after the Agency issues its review report, in accordance with the circumstances set out in [Table 1](#). In exceptional cases, the specific review commission may decide, on justified grounds, to bring the follow-up process forward.

In certain cases, the specific review commission may decide to conduct an on-site follow-up visit for a degree programme to verify *in situ* the status of the requirements and/or enhancement areas identified in the corresponding review report. The on-site follow-up visit will involve at least two experts, who will assess the extent to which these requirements and/or enhancement areas have been addressed. The resulting review report will be submitted to the specific review commission, which will issue the final follow-up report.

³ Article 28 of Royal Decree 822/2021.

3.2. Documents to be submitted

Within the period specified in the call, the institution must submit the following documents via the designated platform:

- a. **Follow-up report:** The centre prepares the follow-up report in accordance with the applicable review guide (see [Table 1](#)). The report must clearly explain how the centre is responding to the status of each requirement and/or enhancement action, specifying both the measures already taken and those still pending. This may take the form, for example, of a status report on the requirements and/or enhancement actions.
- b. **Enhancement actions** being implemented by the centre and/or degree programme to address weaknesses identified in review reports. The centre and/or degree programme may also submit its full **enhancement plan**, which structures the actions to be taken and establishes a timetable for their implementation. This plan is based on quantitative and qualitative information generated through the IQAS and the results of previous reviews.
- c. **Evidence and indicators** relating to aspects identified in previous reviews as requiring mandatory implementation. Evidence must be provided to demonstrate that these aspects have been appropriately addressed or implemented.

The university centre must ensure that reviewers have access to the evidence until the review process has been completed.

3.3. Specific review commissions

The specific review commissions (CEA), established by agreement of AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), are responsible for reviewing the reports prepared by universities on their recognised degree programmes. Their work spans the validation, follow-up, modification and accreditation of recognised university degree programmes. This ensures that the knowledge gained throughout these processes is retained and used to enhance the consistency of decisions across them.

Further information on the functions and composition of AQU Catalunya's review bodies is available on the [AQU Catalunya website](#).

3.4. Review

The specific review commissions assess the extent to which the enhancement areas and requirements identified in the review processes listed in [Table 1](#) have been addressed.

Based on the documents submitted by the university, the commissions prepare the corresponding follow-up review report, in which they state whether sufficient progress has been made on the requirements and enhancement areas. The review report is issued within a maximum of six months from the date on which the follow-up report is submitted.

Where a commission requests an on-site follow-up visit, the procedure set out in [3.1 Planning](#) must be followed.

The institution may submit comments on the preliminary follow-up report where it identifies factual errors and/or significant differences in interpretation. These must be submitted within fifteen working days of the report being issued for consideration by the specific review commission.

4. PUBLICATION AND LABELS

AQU Catalunya will send the review reports to the institution and publish them on its [reports portal](#).

The follow-up procedure does not provide for the issuance of labels or certificates.

5. CONTRIBUTION ROLES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Contribution roles⁴

Esther Huertas Hidalgo: Methodology, Supervision, Validation.

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Collaboration roles

Esther Adot Giménez: Validation.

⁴ NISO CRediT Working Group, *ANSI/NISO Z39.104-2022, CRediT, Contributor Roles Taxonomy*, NISO, 14 January 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3789/ansi.niso.z39.104-2022>.

ANNEX I. CHANGES IN THIS EDITION

This procedure replaces the following documents:

- *Guidelines for Follow-up Recognised Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes* (2014, in Catalan)
- *Guide to Follow-up Recognised Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes* (2022, in Catalan)
- *Guide to Follow-up Recognised PhD Programmes* (2022, in Catalan)

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