



PROCEDURE

Follow-up of Institutional Accreditation of University Centres

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 monitoring 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 640/2021, of 27 July, on the establishment, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, and the institutional accreditation of university centres¹ (hereinafter, Royal Decree 640/2021) provides a regulatory framework that promotes institutional accreditation as a means of making the validation and accreditation of recognised degree programmes faster, more transparent and more efficient. Institutional accreditation is also envisaged as a mechanism for assuring the overall academic quality of university centres, implemented through their internal quality assurance systems (IQAS).

Institutional accreditation monitoring 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. As part of their IQAS, university centres analyse risks in order to mitigate them and ensure that students receive a high-quality education.

Institutional accreditation monitoring should make it possible to assess the centre's compliance with the institutional accreditation standards set out in the corresponding review guide and, where appropriate, to design and implement enhancement actions that demonstrate the centre's commitment to a culture of quality.

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 [Royal Decree 640/2021](#), of 27 July, on the establishment, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, and the institutional accreditation of university centres.

1.1 Scope of the procedure

The institutional monitoring procedure² applies to all institutionally accredited university centres. It encompasses monitoring of the centre's institutional accreditation, the operation of its IQAS and the delivery of the recognised degree programmes offered by the centre, in accordance with Royal Decree 640/2021 and Royal Decree 822/2021.³ The scope of the review will be adjusted using a risk-based approach, while retaining minimum checks on institutional dimensions, indicators and compliance with the commitments associated with recognised degree programmes. In exceptional cases, the specific review commissions may expressly request individual monitoring of a degree programme at an institutionally accredited centre where there are risks or evidence that justify doing so.

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

Table 1. Review guide that applies the procedure and aspects covered by the review

Reference documents	Aspects covered by the review
Guide to the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres	All enhancement areas and requirements identified in institutional review reports
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.

² Throughout this document, references to institutional accreditation monitoring should be understood as referring to AQU Catalunya's institutional monitoring review procedure.

³ Article 29 of [Royal Decree 822/2021](#), of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university education and its quality assurance procedure.

Reference documents	Aspects covered by the review
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.

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 IQAS and the development of a mature quality culture.

1.2 Structure of the procedure

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

2. PURPOSE AND OUTCOME OF MONITORING

2.1 Purpose of the review

Institutional accreditation monitoring is essential for demonstrating the centre's progress in continuous enhancement. Universities are responsible for internally monitoring their own programmes. AQU Catalunya, in turn, will monitor the extent to which the standards in each dimension are being met, taking into account the associated quality risks and focusing on enhancement areas and requirements identified in previous review processes.

Institutional monitoring has two main objectives:

- To provide university centres with a useful tool for assessing the delivery of their academic programmes and related services, as well as the operation of their IQAS; and
- To ensure that this process of reflection provides the basis for renewed institutional accreditation, with renewal representing the culmination of the monitoring process.

The two should be viewed as a single continuous enhancement process leading to external validation of the achieved outcomes.

2.2 Outcome of monitoring

AQU Catalunya's institutional monitoring review procedure does not assign ratings to standards, dimensions or accreditation levels, nor does it alter ratings assigned in previous reviews, as its approach is focused on continuous enhancement.

External review reports resulting from the monitoring of a university centre 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 822/2021.⁴

3. REVIEW PROCEDURE

3.1 Planning

Each year, AQU Catalunya works with the Catalan universities to draw up a proposed schedule of the university centres to undergo monitoring the following year and to agree on the periods for submitting monitoring reports.

Institutional accreditation monitoring takes place three years after the Agency issues its review report. In exceptional cases, the specific review commission may decide, on justified grounds, to bring the monitoring process forward.

In certain cases, the Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment (CEAI) may decide to conduct an on-site monitoring visit to the university centre in order to verify *in situ* the status of the requirements and/or enhancement areas identified in the corresponding review report. The on-site monitoring 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 CAEI, which will issue the final monitoring report.

⁴ Article 28 of [Royal Decree 822/2021](#), of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university education and its quality assurance procedure.

3.2 Documents to be submitted

Within the period agreed with the university, the institution must submit the following documents via the designated platform:

a. Monitoring report

The university centre prepares the monitoring report in accordance with the institutional accreditation guide.

The institutional monitoring process should allow the centre's management team to assess its performance against each institutional accreditation dimension and analyse how effectively its IQAS is operating.

Where the centre has received Agency review reports identifying requirements or enhancement areas, the monitoring report must clearly explain how these have been addressed, specifying both the actions already taken and those that remain pending.

b. The centre's **enhancement plan, which sets out and schedules the actions to be taken. This plan is based on quantitative and qualitative information generated through the IQAS and the results of previous reviews.**

c. Evidence from the IQAS review

The centre must systematically and continuously review and enhance its IQAS processes and procedures, as well as its quality strategy and objectives. This ongoing monitoring and periodic review must be documented in a system review report or equivalent, providing a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of each process and the extent to which the centre's quality objectives have been achieved. The IQAS review report constitutes key evidence for the institutional accreditation monitoring process.

d. Evidence and indicators relating to the institutional accreditation dimensions or to aspects identified in previous reviews as requiring action, in order to demonstrate that these aspects have been satisfactorily addressed or implemented.

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

The review commission reserves the right to request additional evidence where it deems this necessary.

3.3 Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment (CEAI)

The Specific Commission for Institutional Assessment (CEAI), established by agreement of AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), is responsible for reviewing the reports prepared by universities for each centre in the field of higher education, issuing institutional accreditation reports and certifying IQAS. This ensures that the knowledge gained throughout the review processes is retained and used to enhance the consistency of decisions made 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

3.4.1 Review

The CEAI assesses whether the analysis carried out by the university centres meets the requirements of the institutional accreditation dimensions. It considers the clarity of the information provided, focusing particularly on whether the analysis is supported by evidence (data and indicators) rather than being merely descriptive; verifies the operation of the IQAS; and assesses the extent to which enhancement areas and requirements identified in previous review processes have been addressed.

Based on the documents submitted by the centre, the CEAI prepares the corresponding monitoring review report. Monitoring reports may identify good practices, requirements, enhancement areas or recommendations (see section [3.4.2 Preparation of the review report](#)).

Where the CEAI requests an on-site monitoring visit, the procedure set out in section [3.1 Planning](#) must be followed.

The institution may submit comments on the preliminary monitoring report where it identifies factual errors and/or significant differences in interpretation. These must be submitted within twenty working days of the report being issued for consideration by the CEAI.

3.4.2 Preparation of the review report

The institutional monitoring review report will be structured according to the dimensions described in the Guide to the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres. The review report will be issued within a maximum of six months from the date on which the monitoring report is submitted.

In addition to the corresponding rationale, the report may include the following:

- **Good practices**

Noteworthy aspects of the centre that could be adopted by other centres.

These are exceptional aspects supported by results or other evidence, rather than subjective judgements.

- **Requirements**

Very serious shortcomings that compromise the overall quality of the centre.

- **Enhancement areas**

Identified shortcomings that must be addressed before the institutional accreditation visit. Particular attention is paid to these aspects during the institutional accreditation process.

- **Recommendations**

Suggestions for enhancing the overall academic quality of the centre. Implementing recommendations is not mandatory.

In addition, reports may include a section entitled “**Points to consider when preparing future institutional monitoring and accreditation reports**”, setting out actions primarily intended to improve the presentation of data and analyses, make the report easier to understand or ensure that the information provided is complete.

4. PUBLICATION AND LABELS

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

The monitoring procedure does not provide for the issuance of labels or certificates.

5. CONTRIBUTION ROLES

Contribution roles⁵

Esther Adot Giménez: Writing - original draft.

Esther Huertas Hidalgo: supervision, writing - revision and editing.

Collaboration roles

Teresa Pitarch Jovani: Writing - revision and editing.

⁵ 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>.

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