



**AQU CATALUNYA**

# **RECOGNISED DEGREE PROGRAMMES ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE**

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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) (CAIP) and its specific assessment commissions.

University centres which are not institutionally accredited must renew the accreditation of their official degrees. The Council of Universities (Consejo de Universidades in Spanish) is the competent authority in charge of accrediting degree programmes based on the mandatory and binding assessment report issued by AQU Catalunya.

### 1.1. Procedure scope

This procedure is applicable to the accreditation of official bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and PhD/doctoral programmes from university centres which are not institutionally accredited, as well as degrees in Medicine from university centres accredited or not institutionally accredited. This procedure is not applicable to the accreditation of joint international degrees that follow the methodology of the European Approach, nor to the accreditation of arts higher education programmes.

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

Table 1. Applicable procedure assessment guides

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <a href="#"><u>Guide to the accreditation of university bachelor's and master's degree programmes</u></a>   | Official Bachelor's and Master's degrees from university centres which are not institutionally accredited |
| <a href="#"><u>Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes</u></a>  | PhD/Doctorate programmes from university centres which are not institutionally accredited                 |
| <a href="#"><u>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</u></a> | Degrees in Medicine   |

## 1.2. Procedure structure

This document is structured in the following sections: the effects and result of the accreditation, the assessment procedure itself, the procedure adapted for the second and successive accreditations, the publication of the assessment reports and seals and, finally, post-accreditation actions and follow-up for continuous enhancement. In addition, considerations on self-assessment and the change log of the assessment procedure can be found in the document's annexes.

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

## 2. ACCREDITATION EFFECTS AND RESULTS

### 2.1. Accreditation effects

University degree accreditation by the Council of Universities entitles the awarding university to continue to offer the degree, in accordance with the terms established in the last verification 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  |

\* Maximum deadline for the renewal of accreditation from the implementation of the degree or from the last accreditation.

In the event that the Council of Universities does not accredit a degree, the responsible institution will not be able to enrol new students and will have to initiate all the actions included in the verification report to gradually extinguish the degree, while respecting the rights of the enrolled students.

## 2.2. Accreditation result and levels

The result of the accreditation will be expressed as **favourable** or **unfavourable**.

The results are structured in four levels: **accredited in progress towards excellence**, **accredited**, **accredited with conditions** and **not accredited**. The following are the criteria that must be applied for each level of accreditation, depending on whether it is bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and PhD/doctoral programmes (see Table 3) or degrees in Medicine (see Table 4).

Table 3. Applicable criteria to define the level of accreditation in bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and PhD/doctoral programmes (except degrees in Medicine)

| Level                                | Applicable criteria to define the level of accreditation  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Accredited towards excellence</b> | <p>The following three conditions must be met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Not having any element rated with "achieved with conditions" or "not achieved".</li> <li>b. Have at least two elements rated with "in progress towards excellence", and among them either 4 or 6 is mandatory. In addition, it is established that, for elements 4 and 6 to obtain the rating "in progress towards excellence", at least sub-element 4.1 (academic level and experience of the lecturer) must obtain this same degree and 6.1 (academic level and degree learning activities), respectively.</li> <li>c. Have sub-elements 4.1 and 6.1 rated as "in progress towards excellence".</li> </ul> |
| <b>Accredited with conditions</b>    | <p>When one of the following conditions is met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When there are three elements rated with "achieved with conditions".</li> <li>b. When there are at least two elements rated with "achieved with conditions" and one of them is either 4 or 6. If sub-elements 4.1 and 6.1 are achieved with conditions, elements 4 and 6 respectively will also be achieved with conditions.</li> <li>c. When sub-elements 6.1 (academic level and learning activities of the degree) is achieved with conditions.</li> </ul>   |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Not accredited</b> | <p>When any of the following elements is assessed as not achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a.</i> Element 1: quality of the education programme.</li> <li><i>b.</i> Element 4: adaptation of the teaching staff to the education programme.</li> <li><i>c.</i> Element 5: effectiveness of learning support systems.</li> <li><i>d.</i> Element 6: quality of the results of the education programmes.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Accredited</b>     | In the rest of the cases.   |

Table 4. Applicable criteria to define the level of accreditation in degrees in Medicine

| <b>Level</b>                         | <b>Applicable criteria to define the level of accreditation</b>  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Accredited towards excellence</b> | <p>The following three conditions must be met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a.</i> Not having any element rated with "achieved with conditions" or "not achieved".</li> <li><i>b.</i> Have at least two elements rated with "in progress towards excellence", and among them either 3 or 5 is mandatory. In addition, it is established that, for elements 3 and 5 to obtain the rating "in progress towards excellence", at least sub-elements 3.5 (academic results) and 5.1 (policy of 'establishment of academic staff), respectively.</li> <li><i>c.</i> Have sub-elements 3.5 and 5.1 rated as "in progress towards excellence".</li> </ul> |
| <b>Accredited with conditions</b>    | <p>When one of the following conditions is met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>a.</i> When there are three elements rated with "achieved with conditions".</li> <li><i>b.</i> When there are at least two elements rated with "achieved with conditions", and one of them is either 3 or 5. If sub-elements 3.5 and 5.1 are achieved with conditions, elements 3 and 5 respectively will also be achieved with conditions.</li> </ul>   |



|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
|                       | c. When sub-elements 3.5 (academic results) is achieved with conditions.  |
| <b>Not accredited</b> | When any of the following elements is assessed as not achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Element 2: curriculum.</li> <li>b. Element 3: evaluation and results.</li> <li>c. Element 4: students.</li> <li>d. Element 5: lecturers.</li> <li>e. Element 6: educational resources.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Accredited</b>     | In the rest of the cases.   |

The assessment guides (see Table 1) define a system of rubrics that relates the criteria to be assessed to their level of achievement. The rubrics make it possible to determine the level of achievement of each element and sub-element that AQU Catalunya assesses.

## 3. EVALUATION PROCEDURE

### 3.1. Planning

AQU Catalunya and Catalan universities draw up an annual proposal to plan external site visits to institutions that will be subject to external review the following year. Where applicable, this planning includes the degree programmes and institutions to be assessed and the semester in which the external visit is to be carried out. This planning is submitted to the AQU Catalunya Governing Board for approval.

### 3.2. Request for accreditation and documentation to be submitted

The institution must submit the application for degree accreditation to the ministry responsible for universities just before the external assessment visit, and always six months before the maximum date for the renewal of accreditation. The Council of Universities will accept the application if it meets the established requirements. If not, it shall ask the institution to remedy the situation. Once accepted, the request will be transferred to AQU Catalunya within a maximum period of five working days, which will resolve it within a maximum period of six months.

**Two months before the visit** of the External Assessment Committee (CAE) at the centre, the institution must submit the following documentation:

#### *a.* **Self-Assessment Report**

The center drafts a Self-Assessment Report following what is established in the evaluation guide that is applicable to it, and provides the visiting committee with an overview of the deployment of the study plan, the competence profile of the degrees and the mechanisms associated with continuous quality enhancement, among others. The Self-Assessment Report is one of the most relevant pieces when approaching the assessment and must allow the CAE to have key information to prepare the accreditation visit (see Annex I).

The specific assessment committees of each branch select the degree subjects on which evidence must be provided for the analysis of element 6. Universities may, in exceptional and justified cases, request that some of these subjects be changed.

In the case of the accreditation of PhD/doctoral programmes, the self-assessments can be drawn up at degree level, if the institution considers it relevant.

Degrees in Medicine will have to prepare a self-assessment at degree level following what is established in the corresponding guide.

- b. **Evidence and indicators** which must allow the degree of achievement of the elements to be determined. The assessment guides include, as a guideline, a series of evidence and indicators that institutions can provide.

The university centre must guarantee access to the evidence of the assessors until the process has ended.

- c. **The enhancement plan** of the centre and/or the degrees, which organises and sets the schedule of actions to be taken. The enhancement plan is based on quantitative and qualitative information, generated within the framework of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) and the results of previous external assessments.

### 3.3. Student report

The student report of the degree or degrees to be accredited is considered complementary evidence. This is an independent report drawn up by the students of the degrees to be accredited, which accompanies the self-assessment. This is evidence that in no case replaces the participation of the student body in the internal phase of the assessment.

Students will send their report directly to AQU Catalunya so that it can be sent to the CAE.

### 3.4. Composition of the External Assessment Committee (CAE)

Peer review is one of the factors that contribute to guaranteeing the validity, reliability and usefulness of external assessment processes. Assessment in accreditation processes is carried out by experts, who are appointed in committees, where the scientific and technical, professional and student viewpoints are represented.

AQU Catalunya has defined the [Profiles and requirements for taking part in teaching staff, institutional and appeal assessment processes](#). This document sets out the requirements that peer reviewers must meet at AQU Catalunya, the selection criteria and the general criteria for the composition of the assessment committees, among others.

The external assessment is conducted by External Assessment Committees (CAE), whose composition is determined based on the area of knowledge of the degree programmes and the institution to be assessed. AQU Catalunya reports on the composition of the CAE at the institution to indicate whether there is any conflict of interest with any of the persons appointed. Only in this case would a change of composition be made. Once the assessment has been carried out and the External Assessment Report has been issued, the CAE terminates its activity.

The standard composition of a CAE is as follows:

- > A president of the centre's field of knowledge.

- > An **academic spokesperson** of the degree areas to be assessed.
- > A **professional spokesperson** of the centre's field of knowledge.
- > A **student** of the centre's field of knowledge.
- > A **secretary** who is an expert methodology.

The composition of the committees may vary depending on the degrees to be assessed at each centre and the type of visit.

## 3.5. Assessment

The assessment includes the phases described below:

### 3.5.1. Individual assessment

The people who make up the CAE will carry out an individual assessment, which involves the analysis of all the documentation submitted and, especially, the enhancement plan. They will also take into account the information generated in previous assessment processes, public information and the data or indicators included in the EUC portal of AQU Catalunya.

CAE members shall make justified use of the rubrics included in the corresponding assessment guide to assess each sub-element. Assessment of the elements relating to the relevance of public information, the IQAS, the suitability of lecturers and the effectiveness of learning support will be carried out at centre level, although the aspects that are applicable at degree level will be explained. For elements related to the quality of degree programme outcomes and the quality of the degree programme, the assessment will be at degree level, using the relevant rubrics and exemplifying the aspects that justify it.

### 3.5.2. Visit

The external assessment visit can be organised following different formats: face-to-face, virtual or a combined visit. AQU Catalunya will suggest how the external visit should be carried out and the university must confirm the Agency's suggestion.

The CAE will draw up a suggested visit schedule based on the template provided by AQU Catalunya. The centre may suggest some adjustment to the proposed schedule, which must be validated by the CAE. The visit schedule must allow the necessary information to be collected so that the CAE can carry out its assessment tasks.

The centre will organise attendance at the various hearings previously agreed with the CAE (lecturers, students, graduates, administration and service staff, employer group, degree

coordination, management team, quality assurance team, etc.) and the visit to the facilities. The space and resources necessary for the CAE to work must also be foreseen.

The main objective is to get to know how the degree programmes implemented at the centre are carried out *in situ*. The evidence provided will be checked or validated, possible discrepancies will be detected, aspects that can be assessed as excellent will be checked and, where appropriate, new evidence will be obtained to assess aspects not considered in the documentation provided. The visit time will depend on the number of degrees to be assessed and their status. Most assessment visits last **between one and two days**.

During the visit, the CAE will interview all stakeholders (lecturers, management team, students, graduates, administration and service staff, employer group, etc.) and will visit the facilities it considers relevant.

In the case of **centres that provide non-face-to-face or semi-face-to-face teaching**, the visit to the centre is an opportunity to examine the pedagogical model, as well as the degree of innovation and the technological infrastructure. Visits should be made to the same place where this technological infrastructure is located. During the visit, the committee will carry out an analysis of the technological infrastructure and will have direct contact with the technicians, in order to assess, among other aspects, the accessibility and usability of the platform.

### **3.5.3. External assessment report drafting (visit report)**

AQU Catalunya provides a template visit report to the CAE that the committee must follow. In the event that the visit includes more than one degree, the CAE must justify the differentiated rating in the event that there are discrepancies in the assessments.

The report may contain, in addition to the corresponding motivation, the following aspects:

#### **Best practices**

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

These are extraordinary aspects based on results or other evidence, beyond subjective assessments. Ideally, the assessments "in progress towards excellence" should be linked to the identification of best practices.

#### **Requirements**

Very serious shortcomings that compromise the quality of the degree and lead to a non-achievement rating of the element or sub-element.

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 linked to the 'conditional' ratings of the elements or sub-elements.

They may be subject to an appeal by the University.

### **Recommendations**

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

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

In the first instance, the members of the CAE must agree on the content of the visit report, and subsequently the president of the committee validates the report. The draft of the visit report is sent to AQU Catalunya within a maximum period of **four weeks** (not including holiday periods) after the visit.

AQU Catalunya carries out a technical review to analyse the internal consistency of the visit report and the justification of the proposed assessment result. If necessary, you can ask the CAE for clarifications on the content of the report or to reinforce the justification of the proposed result.

Subsequently, AQU Catalunya will send the visit report to the university for review. **The university has fifteen calendar days to report possible factual errors<sup>1</sup>** identified in the visit report. In the event that the university reports factual errors, AQU Catalunya will send this information to the CAE, which will analyse them and revise the visit report whenever necessary. Subsequently, the visit report will be considered as the final version. On the other hand, if in this period the university does not report any factual errors to AQU Catalunya, the visit report sent will be considered the final version.

## **3.6. Decision**

The specific assessment committees (CEA), created by agreement of AQU Catalunya's Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP), are responsible for assessing the degrees to provide their accreditation. In this way, it is guaranteed that the knowledge acquired throughout the assessment processes is maintained and serves to reinforce the

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<sup>1</sup> Factual errors are those aspects that improve the accuracy of the facts or that are formulated in the face of serious misunderstandings. Universities cannot submit additional documentation at this time.

coherence of the decisions taken in the framework of the accreditation. Its main function is to issue the accreditation reports for the degrees that undergo the process, so that the Council of Universities takes the final decision on accreditation. More information on the functions and composition of the assessment bodies can be found on the [AQU Catalunya website](#).

The CEA will draw up the corresponding accreditation report based on the external assessment visit report drawn up by the CAE. This report will be issued as favourable or unfavourable, and taking into account the criteria identified in section 2.2 (Result and levels of accreditation) of this document. It can also include best practices, requirements and/or enhancement areas, depending on each case.

In the decision, the CEA can disagree with the assessments included in the external assessment visit report, setting out the reasons for doing so. The CEA can ask the CAE for additional information, clarifications, and so on, before making its decision.

The institution may submit remarks on the previous accreditation report, within twenty working days from the issuance of the report, for the CEA to take them into consideration. After assessing the remarks submitted, if any, the CEA will produce the final accreditation report and a report in response to the appeals. In the event that the institution does not submit any remarks, the previous accreditation report will be considered as the final report.

### 3.7. Issuing reports and communicating accreditation

AQU Catalunya will jointly issue the external assessment visit report and the accreditation report for each degree. The accreditation report shall be issued within a maximum period of **six months from the date of application for accreditation**. Otherwise, it will be understood that the degree is accredited.

Should the deadline for issuing the report be postponed, in accordance with the applicable regulations (article 22*d* of Law 39/2015, of 1 October, on the common administrative procedure for public administrations), the Agency will notify the university. Postponement may not exceed three months.

AQU Catalunya will communicate the result of the accreditation to the university, the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Ministry of Universities and the Council of Universities.

### 3.8. Register

Once the final resolution has been issued, the Ministry of Universities will communicate it to the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT). If it is favourable, it will proceed with the registration of the corresponding renewal of the accreditation. If it is unfavourable, the degree will be recorded in the RUCT as extinguished from that date. In this case, the

resolution issued will declare the study plan extinguished, and the appropriate measures must be taken to guarantee the academic rights of all students who are studying.

### 3.9. Appeal or review report

The Appeals Commission is in charge of resolving appeals filed against the agreements of the Research Assessment Commission and the other evaluation, certification and accreditation commissions referred to in the article 11 of Law 15/2015, of 21 July 2015, of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency. Its decisions exhaust administrative channels.

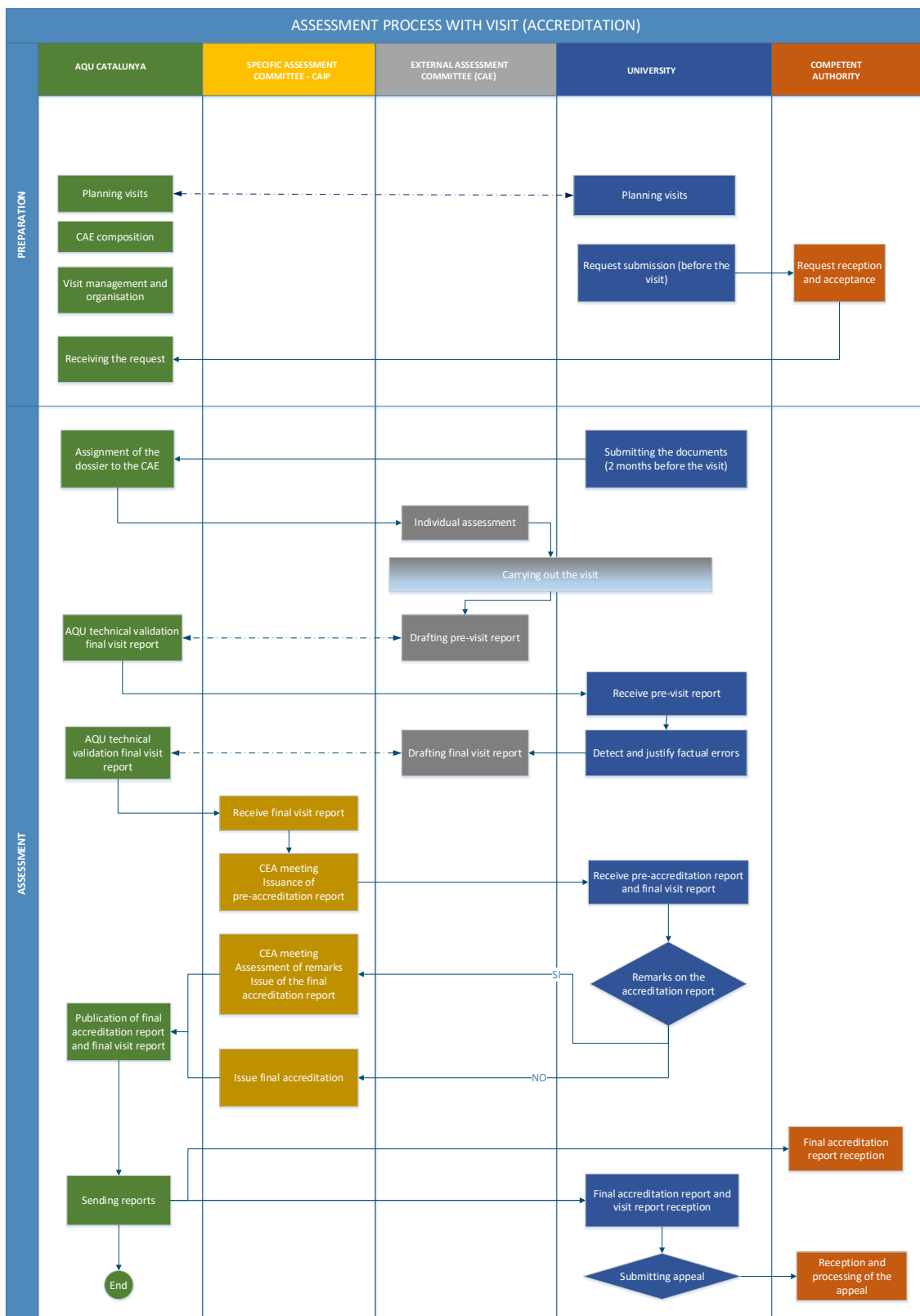
The Appeals Commission is responsible for issuing review reports of other acts issued by the commissions when this is established in the assessment, certification and accreditation processes.

The [procedure](#) below is published on the AQU Catalunya website.

### 3.10. Flowchart

Below is the diagram of the assessment process for accreditation:





## 4. ADAPTED PROCEDURE FOR THE SECOND AND SUBSEQUENT RENEWALS OF ACCREDITATION

This procedure shall **only apply to degree programmes that have renewed accreditation at least once and the outcome is accredited or accredited in progress towards excellence.**

This procedure is not applicable to:

- a. Accredited degrees with conditions**
- b. Degrees in Medicine that must renew accreditation**

Consequently, the degrees found in cases *a* and *b* must follow the accreditation procedure described in section 3 of this document.

The following sections outline the procedural steps that can be adapted, as long as it is ensured that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) are complied with.

### 4.1. Self-Assessment

The Self-Assessment Report submitted by the centre must respond to the accreditation elements defined in the current accreditation guide and must have the usual structure:

- a. Centre overview.** This provides a comprehensive overview of the centre and can include information on the most significant achievements of the centre's track record, such as the growth in the number of students, graduates, faculty, etc.
- b. Self-report drafting process.** A brief description of the process followed in the self-assessment and its rating (compliance with deadlines, stakeholder involvement, quality of the evidence, degree of satisfaction, etc.).
- c. Accreditation elements achievement rating. An evidence-based reasoning on the degree of achievement of the six elements and the different sub-elements of accreditation must be provided.** Therefore, the centre must reflect on the achievement of the six elements and make an evaluative analysis.
- d. Evidence** corresponding to **elements 1, 4 and 6**, in addition to those related to the conditional aspects (if any) of the previous accreditation and any other aspects that may have changed substantially since the previous accreditation. Table 5 shows the minimum evidence required for each element.

Table 5. Minimum evidence required for each element (adapted procedure)

| Element   | Evidence of university degree / master's degree   | Evidence PhD/doctoral programmes   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>1. Quality of the education programme</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Memory verification</li> <li>- Access and offer of places (sub-element 1.2)</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Memory verification</li> <li>- Access and admission (sub-element 1.1)</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>2. Relevance of public information</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Institution web page</li> <li>- Degree web page</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Institution web page</li> <li>- Degree web page</li> </ul>  |
| <b>3. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- IQAS Manual</li> <li>- IQAS review documents/reports and enhancement plans</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- IQAS Manual</li> <li>- IQAS review documents/reports and enhancement plans</li> </ul>                                 |
| <b>4. Adaptation of the teaching staff to the education programme</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturer profile and teaching appointment (sub-element 4.1)</li> <li>- Sufficiency of lecturers (sub-element 4.2)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Profile of the PDI (sub-element 4.1)</li> <li>- Sufficiency of the PDI (sub-element 4.2)</li> </ul>                   |
| <b>5. Effectiveness of learning support systems</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching support staff (sub-element 5.1)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Material resources (sub-element 5.1)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>6. Quality of the results of the education programmes</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning outcomes achieved (sub-element 6.1)</li> <li>- Academic performance (sub-element 6.3)</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning outcomes achieved (sub-element 6.1)</li> <li>- Derived scientific contributions (sub-element 6.2)</li> </ul> |

As complementary evidence, the student report of the degree or degrees to be accredited is identified (see section 3.3).

**e.** The self-report must always be accompanied by the **enhancement plan**, which takes into consideration the monitoring of the actions carried out in the last period, the **targets** that are intended to be achieved and the **results**.

**f.** The centre must set its own **analysis of the effectiveness of the implemented actions based on the results obtained**, especially:

- > **The aspects conditioned in the previous accreditation and those others that may have changed substantially since the last accreditation.**
- > **The teaching and research staff.**
- > **The academic results, especially those corresponding to TFG/TFM and compulsory external practices.**

## 4.2. Assessment

The CAE will have, whenever possible, at least one expert who participated in the last assessment.

If during the assessment the CAE considers it appropriate to have additional information, AQU Catalunya will ask the university to make it available to the CAE at the time of the visit.

The CEAs of each branch select the degree subjects on which evidence must be provided for the analysis of element 6. Universities may, in exceptional and justified cases, request that some of these subjects be changed.

The CAE focuses its action on:

- a. The analysis of the actions carried out by the centre to address the conditions that appeared in the last accreditation and the new actions implemented as a result of the follow-up.**
- b. The analysis of compliance with the sub-elements of Table 5. For the rest of the elements, the CAE will only assess the changes made with respect to the last accreditation.**
- c. The consideration of the criteria for accreditation and the conditions defined for the accreditation of degrees (see section 2.2). The analysis of sub-elements 4.1 and 6.1 is particularly relevant.**

The CAE should argue its rating based on the available evidence and should meet with all stakeholders.

## 4.3. External Assessment Report

The external assessment report is complete and all elements and sub-elements are assessed.

## 5. PROCEDURE FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF CROSS-CUTTING ELEMENTS IN THE FRAMEWORK FOR ACCREDITATION OF PHD PROGRAMMES

The *Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes* includes a set of elements that are cross-cutting in all the university's programmes. When universities are required to initiate the renewal process for PhD programmes, AQU Catalunya must organise the assessment process in two phases:

- > Assessment of cross-cutting elements phase.
- > Assessment of PhD programme-specific elements phase.

By introducing the assessment phase for cross-cutting elements, the visiting committees' work can be streamlined and the pressure on the universities to carry out the assessment is reduced.

The details of both assessment phases are described below.

### 5.1. Cross-cutting phase

AQU Catalunya is required to appoint one external assessment committee per university to assess the cross-cutting elements of PhD programmes.

The composition of the external assessment committee (CAE by its Spanish acronym) should, in general, be as follows:

- > A president who is an academic with a minimum of two active six-year research quality premiums.
- > An academic with a minimum of one active six-year research quality premium.
- > A PhD student.
- > A methodologist.

#### Elements to be assessed

The CAE must assess all the aspects that are cross-cutting to every programme at that university and which, where they exist, are centralised in the PhD School. The following aspects should be considered by the CAE, grouped according to the [\*Guide to the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes\*](#):

- > Sub-element 1.2. The programme has adequate mechanisms for supervising PhD students and, if necessary, training activities.
- > Element 2. Relevance of public information.

- > Element 3. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system.
- > Sub-element 4.3. The PhD programme is equipped with the appropriate measures to foster thesis supervision and tutoring of researchers and trainee researchers.
- > Sub-element 5.1. The technical, management and administrative and service staff is competent and has the appropriate level of involvement to attend to students and guarantee the functioning of resources and infrastructures.
- > Sub-element 5.2. The services available to students provide adequate support for the learning process and facilitate entry into the labour market.

### Procedure

In general, the [\*Recognised degree programmes accreditation procedure\*](#) must be applied, with the following special features:

- > The PhD School is required to prepare a self-report analysing the aspects detailed in the previous section. This self-assessment must include an improvement plan.
- > The visit must take place before the start of the programme assessments.
- > The cross-cutting assessment does not involve the issuing of a seal of accreditation.

### 5.2. Specific phase

Once the cross-cutting phase has been completed, the assessment for accreditation of the individual PhD programmes must be carried out.

In general, the composition of the CAE should be as follows:

- > A president who is an academic with a minimum of two active six-year research quality premiums.
- > One academic from each disciplinary area per programme to be assessed, with a minimum of an active six-year research quality premium.
- > A PhD student.
- > A methodologist.

### Elements to be assessed

The CAE must assess every aspect set out in the [\*Guide for the accreditation of recognised PhD programmes\*](#) and not assessed in the cross-cutting phase:

- > Sub-element 1.1. The programme puts in place mechanisms to ensure that the entry profile of those enrolled is appropriate and their number is coherent with the

characteristics and distribution of the programme's lines of research and the number of places on offer.

- > Sub-element 4.1. The teaching staff has an accredited research activity.
- > Sub-element 4.2. The teaching staff is sufficient and adequately dedicated to carry out their duties.
- > Sub-element 4.4. Foreign lecturers and international PhDs participate to an adequate degree in the programme's scientific area as regards the monitoring commissions and thesis tribunals.
- > Sub-element 5.3. The physical resources available are adequate as far as the number of PhD students and the characteristics of the PhD programme are concerned.

*If necessary, due to the specific features of the programme:*

- a. Sub-element 5.1. The technical, management and administrative and service staff is competent and has the appropriate level of involvement to attend to students and guarantee the functioning of resources and infrastructures.*
- > Element 6. Quality of the results.

## Procedure

In general, the [Recognised degree programmes accreditation procedure](#) must be applied, with the following special features:

- > Each of the programmes must prepare a self-report analysing the aspects detailed in the previous section. This self-assessment must include an improvement plan.
- > The CAE must incorporate the assessment aspects contained in the cross-sectional report into its report. It may qualify them when evidence exists that their development has been different from the result of the cross-sectional assessment.

## 6. PUBLICATION AND SEALS

The assessment reports and external assessment visit reports will be published on the [AQU Catalunya report website](#) and on the database [Database of External Quality Assurance Results](#) of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education).

AQU Catalunya generates the [Quality labels and certificates](#) for each assessment process, according to what was approved by the Agency's Governing Council. More information on seals and quality certificates can be consulted on the [University Studies of Catalonia](#) website.

## 7. MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS ENHANCEMENT

Once the degree has been accredited, it must carry out a process of reflection on its development. Reflection is carried out based on the same accreditation process elements, included in the applicable guidelines, and part of the latest enhancement plan. Thus, the degree monitoring process becomes the basis for the next accreditation, which is the culmination of the monitoring process.

Although internal to the institution, monitoring is a compulsory process, and the resulting reports are some of the main evidences in the accreditation process. In any case, the institutions are obliged to send to AQU Catalunya the monitoring reports of those degrees which in their evaluation report include aspects that must be enhanced. The CEAs will study them to assess the degree of enhancement in these aspects.



## ANNEX I. SELF-REPORT

Processes associated with the quality assurance of teaching are described in the institutions' IQASs. Therefore, IQAS is positioned as a fundamental instrument for the accreditation of degrees and must constitute the point of reference in the process of drafting the self-report.

To guarantee the quality of the process, the self-report must be, among other things:

- a. Complete, rigorous and specific. It must analyse and assess the elements considered key to the reality that is to be analysed and enhanced.**
- b. Based on evidence generated in the monitoring process and new evidence resulting from education programmes (for example, student achievements).**
- c. Systematic and detailed with regard to the analysis of the causes and, therefore, of what is necessary to address the enhancements.**
- d. Balanced, both in positive aspects and in aspects that need to be enhanced.**
- e. Shared and validated by the university community, in order to ensure its representativeness in the analysis. The self-report must be subject to public information and approved according to the procedures established in the IQAS.**

### I. Phases of the self-report drafting process

#### **1. Constitution of the Self-assessment Committee (CAI)**

The assessed unit, in accordance with what is established in its IQAS, must constitute the committee of the centre responsible for drafting the self-report. Centre representatives of the different stakeholders must participate in this committee, such as the management team, lecturers, administrative staff, students and others who are deemed appropriate.

If the committee drafting the self-report does not have experience in the assessment process, *ad hoc* training is recommended, in which the key aspects to be analysed are explained, bearing in mind the methodology undertaken.

#### **2. Information collection system**

**The drafting of the self-report cannot be an *ex novo* process.** The centre must follow the processes contained in its IQAS. Accreditation must be understood as the culmination of the monitoring process where the CAI must add the information collected in the previous monitoring reports and add the latest data corresponding to the last academic year. The aggregation will correspond to data and analyses of both the centre and its degrees. The information can be quantitative or qualitative, ranging from data and indicators on inputs to processes and results of the institution's activity.

Regarding the degrees taught, the self-report information must cover the period between the verification (or last accreditation) and the last academic year completed before the external visit for accreditation.

### ***3. Drafting the self-report***

Once all the information is available, the CAI must analyse and reflect on the data holistically, responding to the accreditation elements and providing the basis for a good enhancement plan.

### ***4. Public disclosure***

The institution will make the self-report publicly available in order to be validated by the university community. **No report can be sent to AQU Catalunya that has not been made publicly available.**

### ***5. Final validation and referral to AQU Catalunya***

Finally, the self-report must be validated by the corresponding institutional body before being sent to AQU Catalunya.

## **II. Content of the self-report**

The self-report must respond to the accreditation elements defined in the applicable guide. The document is structured in the following main sections:

### ***1. Centre overview***

In this section, the institution should provide a comprehensive overview of the centre, in order to identify the people who assess the self-report. As such, it can include information on the most significant achievements of the centre's track record, such as the growth in the number of students, graduates, faculty, etc.

### ***2. Self-report drafting process***

The institution must briefly describe the process followed when drafting the self-report, which should be incorporated into the degree accreditation process within the IQAS framework, mentioning the setting up of the committee responsible for the drafting, the systematisation of data aggregation, the participation of stakeholders, the consultation phase and the final reflection, including a rating of the quality of the self-report drafting process (compliance with deadlines, involvement of stakeholders, quality of evidence, degree of satisfaction, etc.).

### **3. Accreditation elements achievement rating**

In this section, the institution must make an evidence-based argument about the degree of achievement regarding the accreditation elements corresponding to the applicable guide.

For the centre and for each degree, depending on the element in question, the institution must carry out an assessment with direct reference to the most significant data that highlight compliance with the elements. In each case, the degree of achievement of the intended objectives and the achievement of the specifications established in the verified report must be assessed (for example, if the intended training profile has been achieved, if the commitments have been fulfilled regarding personnel resources, if the planning carried out conforms to the plan or if it needs to be modified, etc.).

**The centre is recommended to rate each element and each sub-element according to the scale of four ratings (in progress towards excellence, achieved, achieved with conditions, not achieved) that appears in the corresponding guide.**

Specific considerations to take into account when preparing the self-report for accreditation of degrees and master's (except for the degree in Medicine):

- > Element 1, apart from the adequacy of the student entry profile (especially in master's studies) and the coordination mechanisms, is achieved directly by keeping the information related to the study plan updated through of the processes provided for this purpose. However, the institution will have to report the changes it has undergone since its verification in the report and, in any case, the CAE could assess sub-elements 1.1 (Intended learning outcomes) and 1.3 (Deployment of the study pan) if necessary.
- > Elements 2 (Relevance of public information), 3 (Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system) and 5 (Effectiveness of learning support systems) will be developed mainly at center level, and elements 4 (Adequacy of teachers in the training program) and 6 (Quality of the results of the education programme) on a degree scale. With regard to the elements at centre level, it is necessary to make a overall reflection and, where appropriate, point out the particularities associated with the different degrees.

### **4. Rating and enhancement plan proposal**

The institution must analyse and reflect on the operation of the centre and the development of the degrees taught. This reflection must be based both on public information and on the data, indicators and qualitative information derived from its IQAS.

As a result of the evaluation analysis, enhancement actions will be proposed that must be integrated into an enhancement plan for the centre, which must include cross-cutting enhancement actions for the centre and specific enhancement actions for the degrees that require it.

### **5. Evidence**

Evidence to be added or annexed to the self-report are those listed in the corresponding guide linked to each element, and should be available and accessible to CAE members.

**In the case of centres that provide non-face-to-face or semi-face-to-face teaching**, the self-report must include a description of the pedagogical model and a detailed explanation of the virtual learning environment in element 1 (Quality of the education programme). In addition to the self-report, before the visit to the centre, it must facilitate access to the system, classes, debates, teaching materials, etc.

## ANNEX II. CHANGE LOG

The *Guide to the accreditation of university bachelor's and master's degree programmes*, from the first edition (November 2013) to the seventh edition (December 2021), includes the assessment procedure.

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

The main changes made to the first edition are as follows:

- > A section on the scope and structure of the procedure is included.
- > The sections are reordered.
- > The period for processing the accreditation request is established.
- > The factual error review phase of the external assessment report (visit report) is separated from the remarks phase (degree report).
- > The concepts of *best practices*, *requirements*, *enhancement areas* and *recommendations* are redefined, standardising them with the rest of the degree and centre assessment processes.

The second edition includes the following change:

- > Addition of section 5, "Procedure for the assessment of cross-cutting elements in the accreditation of PhD programmes".

Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya

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