



Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
de **Catalunya**

SUMMARY OF THE AQU CATALUNYA ANNUAL REPORT 2014



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AQU CATALUNYA, 2015



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Universitari de Catalunya**

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INTRODUCTION

This document summarises the AQU Catalunya Annual Report 2014, which describes the principal activities carried out by the Agency over the course of the year. The most pertinent of these activities are reported on the pages that follow, beginning with the deployment of the accreditation process, which is the final phase in the VSMA Framework for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degree programmes. In the accreditation phase, 34 external site visits were organised to review 80 degree programmes. Elsewhere, field work was carried out for the **fifth survey of labour market outcomes** for graduates of pre-Bologna degree courses, European master's degrees and doctoral programmes, and the Agency launched its **employers survey**, which forms part of a broader project to seek out the viewpoint of enterprises and institutions regarding the training and skills profiles of recent graduates in Catalonia. Finally, looking to the future, the Board of Management has given its approval to the **AQU Catalunya Strategic Plan 2015-2018**, which will seek to assure the technical quality of AQU activities, to identify and integrate international best practices, to increase the involvement of universities in the Agency's activities, and to raise the profile of AQU Catalunya among its stakeholders.

The full Annual Report 2014 is available in Catalan at the following address: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_37488487_1.pdf



TEACHING QUALITY

1. Accreditation

2014 saw the deployment of the final phase of the VSMA Framework: accreditation. This is the most important phase in the VSMA process, entailing an external site visit to verify that a given degree programme is being offered in accordance with the plans presented at the time of validation.

In Catalonia, the accreditation phase is divided into a further two stages: the **external site visit** and award of the corresponding **accreditation**. In the first stage, an external panel conducts an *in situ* review of the degree programme and records its findings in the external visit report. In the second stage, the special review panel for the subject area in question issues the accreditation report, which assesses the degree programme on the basis of the quantitative and qualitative information held by AQU Catalunya; the external visit report is a key component of this assessment.

In 2014, the Agency also revised its *Guide to the accreditation of recognised bachelor and master's degree programmes*, making a series of improvements to key areas. The standards outlined in the guide apply to six criteria considered in the validation and monitoring stages:

- Programme quality
- Relevance of public information
- Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system
- Suitability to teach of staff on the programme
- Efficiency of learning support systems
- Quality of programme outcomes

In addition to these criteria, institutions may request the assessment of three additional areas, or 'dimensions', each with its specific criteria and standards: **entry into work and employment outcomes**, **research-teaching linkages**, and **internationalisation**.

Teaching quality

During 2014, **27 external assessment committees were formed and 34 external site visits carried out, to assess a total of 80 degree programmes**. Assessment of additional dimensions was requested for 8 programmes: in 4 cases, for compliance with standards on internationalisation; in the other 4 cases, for compliance with work and employment criteria. The total number of degree programmes assessed in 2014 was 218% higher than in 2011.

As part of the accreditation process, the special review panel for each subject area issues a joint accreditation report, based on the information gathered during the external site visit. The report may be either favourable or unfavourable, with a definitive outcome expressed as one of the following four levels: Accreditation on track to excellence, Accreditation, Accreditation with prescriptions, and Accreditation withheld.

On the basis of the accreditation report, AQU Catalunya acknowledges favourably reviewed programmes by issuing the corresponding quality certificates and labels.



The accreditation report is submitted to and studied by the competent regional and national authorities as part of the official procedure leading to final accreditation of a degree programme.

2. Validation, modification and monitoring

Validation (*ex ante* assessment) has a number of aims, including quality assurance in the design of proposals for degree studies and recognised doctoral programmes, through a process targeting continuous improvement. In this specific area, 2014 was notable for the approval of the *Guidelines for the validation of undergraduate studies with a reduced credit load*.

A total of 193 proposals were submitted for validation during the year: 27 bachelor's degree programmes (96% favourably assessed), 104 master's degree programmes (88% favourably assessed) and 62 doctorate programmes (98% favourably assessed). Forty-nine percent of the assessments carried out were to re-validate current programmes, while 51% were for the validation of new programmes.

One hundred and five proposals for the **modification** of recognised degree programmes were submitted in 2014: 79 bachelor's degree programmes (99% favourably assessed) and 26 master's degree programmes (85% favourably assessed); this represents an improvement of 9% on the corresponding figure for 2013 (96).

Finally, during 2014 AQU Catalunya issued monitoring reports for the higher courses in artistic disciplines that had been validated in 2013, and in November the Agency began the monitoring process for the courses validated in 2014. Some 21 courses have been monitored to date. In addition, a series of amendments were made to the *Guide to the accreditation of recognised bachelor and master's degree programmes*.

3. International subject-specific quality labels

The Board of Management recently approved the *Framework for the positioning of AQU Catalunya regarding subject-specific quality labels*, which states that the Agency:

- shall not specifically promote quality labels;
- shall provide support to all universities in the university system in Catalonia that wish to obtain a quality label;
- shall recognise the external site visit and achievements associated with quality labels awarded.

The Board has also approved the *Guide to obtaining a quality label for recognised bachelor and master's degree programmes, as part of accreditation by AQU Catalunya*.

4. Certification of internal quality assurance systems (IQAS)

In 2014, the Board of Management approved the *Guidelines for the certification of the IQAS and its effects on processes carried out in the VSMA Framework*, which lays down the general principles for certification of the internal quality assurance systems (IQAs) required at all Catalan university faculties and schools. These principles are intended to help faculties and schools acquire greater independence in the validation and modification of their degree courses.



AQU Catalunya also approved the creation and composition of the Special Committee for the Certification of IQAs Implementation, which will oversee certification of the QA systems and quality assessment procedures employed by Catalan universities, faculties, schools and departments.



TEACHING STAFF QUALITY

1. Ex-ante assessment of teaching staff prior to recruitment at Catalan universities

In 2014, all calls for applications were managed via the Generalitat de Catalunya's on-line applications website (OVT). AQU Catalunya also launched NEXUS, an in-house expert management tool to enhance the assessment process.

Tenure-track lecturer reports

The outcomes of the calls for tenure-track lecturer reports in 2014 were as follows:

Table 1. Results of the second call in 2013 for tenure-track lecturer reports¹

Field of knowledge	TS	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	29	2	19	8	70.4%
Social Sciences	67	9	28	30	46.6%
Sciences	14	0	13	1	92.9%
Life Sciences	20	1	10	9	52.6%
Medical Sciences	19	1	14	4	77.8%
Engineering and Architecture	31	2	27	2	93.1%
Total	180	15	111	54	66.7%

¹ TS: total applications; TSR: total unresolved; TF: total favourable; TD: total unfavourable; % F: percentage favourable out of total (excluding unresolved).

Table 2. Results of the first call in 2014 for tenure-track lecturer reports

Field of knowledge	TS	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	31	4	18	9	62.9%
Social Sciences	75	7	34	34	48.5%
Sciences	11	2	8	1	88.9%
Life Sciences	13	0	8	5	61.5%
Medical Sciences	27	1	14	12	53.9%
Engineering and Architecture	50	5	36	9	77.8%
Total	207	19	118	70	61.2%

Accreditations for research and advanced research

The outcomes of the calls opened in 2014 were as follows:

Table 3. Results of the second call in 2013 for tenured assistant professor reports

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	25	1	15	9	62.5%
Social Sciences	71	2	50	19	69.6%
Sciences	20	0	17	3	85.0%
Life Sciences	21	1	12	8	60.0%
Medical and Health Sciences	32	3	13	16	41.4%
Engineering and Architecture	43	4	28	11	71.8%
Total	212	11	135	66	65.7%

Teaching staff quality

Table 4. Results of the first call in 2014 for tenured assistant professor reports

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	34	2	19	13	59.4%
Social Sciences	60	5	37	18	67.3%
Sciences	22	1	19	2	90.5%
Life Sciences	25	2	16	7	69.6%
Medical and Health Sciences	46	6	14	26	35.0%
Engineering and Architecture	40	3	27	10	73.0%
Total	227	19	132	76	63.46%

Table 5. Results of the second call in 2013 for full professor reports

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	4	0	1	3	25.0%
Social Sciences	18	0	13	5	66.7%
Sciences	7	0	6	1	85.7%
Life Sciences	8	1	6	1	85.7%
Medical and Health Sciences	9	1	6	2	75.0%
Engineering and Architecture	15	1	12	2	71.4%
Total	61	3	44	14	70.7%

Table 6. Results of the first call in 2014 for full professor reports

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	7	0	3	4	42.9%
Social Sciences	20	1	11	8	57.9%
Sciences	8	0	7	1	87.5%
Life Sciences	2	0	1	1	50.0%
Medical and Health Sciences	8	1	3	4	42.9%
Engineering and Architecture	16	2	7	7	50.0%
Total	61	4	32	25	56.1%

Certificates of academic affiliation to other institutions prior to the opening of recruitment calls for contract teaching and research staff

AQU Catalunya has approved the procedure for issuing certificates of academic affiliation to other institutions prior to the announcement of recruitment calls for contract teaching and research staff. Universities who are interested in receiving this certification may now make requests as and when they require.

Teaching assessment certificates

Five applications were received in 2014: four were assessed favourably, while one was left unresolved.

2. Assessment of merits in research, teaching and management

Merits in research

Table 7. Results of the second (extraordinary) call in 2013 for public service teaching and research staff at public universities

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	47	5	38	4	90.5%
Social Sciences	36	12	22	2	91.7%
Sciences	21	6	15	0	100%
Life Sciences	10	1	9	0	100%
Medical and Health Sciences	32	3	29	0	100%
Engineering and Architecture	41	3	38	1	100%
Total	187	30	151	7	96.2%

Teaching staff quality

Table 8. Results of the 2014 call for public service teaching and research staff at public universities

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	60	1	56	3	94.9%
Social Sciences	127	11	110	6	94.8%
Sciences	106	4	101	1	99.0%
Life Sciences	31	0	31	0	100%
Medical and Health Sciences	76	3	73	0	100%
Engineering and Architecture	145	9	135	1	99.3%
Total	545	28	506	11	97.9%

Table 9. Results of the 2014 call for contract teaching and research staff at public universities

Field of knowledge	T	TSR	TF	TD	% F
Humanities	55	4	37	14	64.7%
Social Sciences	73	4	55	13	78.3%
Sciences	49	5	35	6	79.6%
Life Sciences	34	0	32	2	94.1%
Medical and Health Sciences	29	3	20	5	76.9%
Engineering and Architecture	98	5	63	17	65.6%
Total	338	21	242	57	74.1%

Agreements dealing with the assessment of research premiums

This year, AQU Catalunya signed agreements with TecnoCampus Mataró-Maresme, an affiliated centre of Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), and the Salesian School of Sarrià (EUSS), which is affiliated to the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

Table 10. Institutions with which agreements have been signed for the assessment of research premiums Results 2014

Institution	TS	TSR	TF	TD	RP
Private Catalan universities	71	0	49	22	2
UPC (assessment of research staff)	3	0	2	1	1
INEFC	5	0	1	4	0
TecnoCampus Mataró-Maresme	3	0	3	0	0
Salesian School of Sarrià	13	0	11	1	1
Universidad de Extremadura	60	5	30	25	1
Total	155	5	96	53	5

Merits in teaching and management

Assessment of merits in teaching: teaching assessment handbooks

AQU Catalunya has extended to 31 December 2019 its existing accreditations of teaching assessment handbooks at public universities in the Catalan university system. During 2014, the Agency also certified assessment reports for merits in teaching at Catalan public universities.

Table 11. Results of the 2013 call for certification of the assessment of merits in teaching

Potential applicants	Total applicants	Percentage applications	Favourable	Percentage favourable/ applications	Unfavourable	Percentage unfavourable/ applications	Percentage favourable/ potential applicants
2,374	1,452	61.2%	1,361	93.7%	33	2.3%	57.3%

The total number of potential applicants includes teaching staff assessed in previous calls but also entitled to re-apply in the 2013 call.

Teaching staff quality

Assessment of merits in management

Table 12. Results of the 2013 call for certification of the assessment of merits in management

Assessed periods	Favourable	Unfavourable	1st period	2nd period	3rd period	4th period
336	336	0	137	91	60	48

The information in the table refers to periods of external assessment of management skills, not individual members of staff.

Pilot project on departmental assessment

AQU Catalunya has compiled and approved its *Guide to the assessment of departmental research activity. Pilot plan*. The guide sets out an approach for assessing the overall body of a university's research activity as an aggregation of the work carried out by its individual departments. In 2014, one Catalan university requested departmental assessment using the AQU methodology.



KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND TRANSFER

1. Catalan university system

Graduate employment

AQU Catalunya has completed its fifth survey of labour market outcomes, which examines the employment situation of the graduate population from Catalan universities. The survey was brought to a close during the first semester of 2014, following extensive consultation with graduates of pre-Bologna degrees who completed their studies in 2009 (with the exception of Medicine graduates, who finished in 2007) and with candidates who obtained their doctorates in 2009 and 2010. In this latest edition, surveys were also taken by master's degree graduates who completed their studies in 2010 and 2011.

Responses were received from 17,295 graduates, from a total reference population of 31,734 (giving a response rate of 55% and sample error of 0.51%), and from 2,107 doctorate holders, from a reference population of 3,104 (response rate 69%, sample error 1.5%).

In 2014, AQU presented the survey results for pre-Bologna degree graduates and doctoral graduates. The key conclusion was that the Catalan university system is a key driver of employability: university studies improve overall employment prospects (the employment rates recorded in the survey were 85% for pre-Bologna graduates and 93% for doctoral graduates), reduce time to employment after graduation (77% of pre-Bologna graduates had found paid employment within three months of completing their studies), and guarantee higher salaries (the average gross monthly salary was almost 1,900 euros among pre-Bologna graduates and higher among doctoral graduates). In addition, the survey records a general improvement in the level of student satisfaction with the training received during their degree courses. The results of the study are presented in the publications *Universities and employment in Catalonia 2014* and *The employment outcomes of doctoral degree holders from universities in Catalonia* (both available on the Agency's website, www.aqu.cat).

AQU Catalunya, in partnership with Catalan universities, has opened a grant call with a total value of 35,000 euros in support of efforts to establish a comprehensive diagnosis of graduate labour outcomes.

Knowledge generation and transfer

Databases containing the full results of the labour market surveys carried out to date have been made available to the wider academic and research communities, to leverage the comprehensive information they provide on the labour market outcomes of graduates from the Catalan university system.

Employer survey

The "la Caixa" Foundation, through an agreement with the Generalitat de Catalunya, has worked with AQU Catalunya to compile a detailed study of graduate employment outcomes from the unique perspective of their employers. The study aims give universities real-world insight into what the labour market thinks about the training received by graduates during their studies and the skills profiles they have acquired by the time of graduation.

The scientific committee assigned to the project adapted the existing survey to the novel perspective and oversaw the population and sample design; it is also in charge of designing the script for the focus group sessions scheduled for the second phase of the project in 2015.

The methodology required four separate surveys to be adapted: a generic survey for private companies, a second for primary and secondary school teachers, a third for civil servants, and a fourth for the healthcare sector.

Student satisfaction survey

In 2012, AQU Catalunya launched a collaborative initiative with Catalan university partners to define a new instrument for gauging student satisfaction after graduation. Its goal is to establish a series of common graduate satisfaction indicators that will provide the information needed by course managers and the university system as a whole to improve the quality of degree programmes across Catalonia.

With the use of satisfaction surveys set to increase throughout the Catalan university system, a Technical Survey Committee has been created that will seek to improve the coordination of survey design, data collection and outcome analysis by the different institutions and to ensure efficient use of AQU and university resources.

2. Workshops and conferences

‘Accreditation of recognised university degree programmes’

The conference on accreditation of recognised university degree programmes, held in 2014, had a twofold aim: to present the actions implemented by the Agency to simplify the validation, modification and monitoring of degree programmes, and to explain the new procedures for external site visits and accreditation introduced in 2014.

Presentation of the results of the fifth survey of labour market outcomes

The Agency released its analysis of the fifth survey of labour market outcomes, together with the two publications that contain the detailed results of the survey: *Universities and employment in Catalonia 2014* and *The employment outcomes of doctoral degree holders from universities in Catalonia*. A press conference was arranged on the day the analysis was released to present the main outcomes to the media.

‘Quality, a tool for the internationalisation of university degree programmes at Catalan universities’

The recent quality workshop had three aims: to identify strategies to promote knowledge-based economies and to attract university students that are being developed around the world, to discuss internationalisation strategies for higher education institutions and study programmes, and to examine the range of QA instruments that AQU Catalunya can make available to Catalan universities.

Identifying areas for improvement in doctoral studies

Following an analysis of survey data to identify the quality of employment outcomes among doctoral degree holders, a work session was organised with course managers and heads of studies to discuss possible areas in which the quality of doctoral programmes could be improved. In 2014, the Agency also presented its *Guide to the monitoring of recognised doctoral programmes*.



INTERNATIONALISATION

1. Support for the internationalisation of the Catalan university system

Reflection on internationalisation

The workshop 'Quality, an instrument for the internationalisation of degree programmes at Catalan universities', organised jointly with participating universities, provided an opportunity to examine specific QA and quality improvement instruments that will reinforce strategies for the internationalisation of degree programmes.

Accreditation of international educational institutions for academic cooperation and mobility

Following a number of requests for accreditation from international institutions, AQU Catalunya has compiled its *Guidelines for the creation of quality accreditation of international educational institutions for academic cooperation and mobility*. The guidelines set out the procedure for obtaining accreditation from AQU Catalunya for international educational institutions that can demonstrate minimum quality standards and are interested in academic cooperation and student mobility initiatives with the Catalan university system, subject to meeting a series of basic functional requirements.

2. Institutional relations

INQAAHE

In 2014, AQU Catalunya took over full management of the Secretariat of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). During the year, the Agency organised and oversaw the management of

meetings of the Executive Committee (April 2014, Barcelona), the Board of Directors and the General Assembly (May 2014, Tallinn).

Its main areas of responsibility as the Secretariat's management body are: **management of annual calls and projects, support to the Board of Directors, support to members** of the network, and **economic management**.

ENQA

AQU Catalunya has represented the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) at meetings of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and in the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment (EMQA) pilot project, carried out through the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

ECA

AQU Catalunya coordinates the ECA working group on mutual recognition and joint programmes, which has completed preliminary work towards the presentation of a European project to explore mutual recognition of joint programmes in a climate of liberalisation of assessment processes.

3. International projects

During 2014, AQU Catalunya maintained its participation in the following international projects and networks: CeQuInt, ERANET-MUNDUS, collaboration agreement with the ASIIN accreditation agency (Germany), IMPALA, ENQA Working Group on Impact of QA, ISLAH, EQuAM, PACAgro, ASEAN-QA, ENQA Quality Procedures Project, and KP3 Group.



STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

1. AQU Catalunya Strategic Plan

The recently approved Strategic Plan 2015-2018 was produced in four stages: the first to plan the project; the second to gather in-house information; the third to draft the document itself, and the final stage, which involved an external review by the Catalan government, university authorities, members of the review panels, AQU advisers and former heads of the Agency. The definitive Strategic Plan was endorsed by the AQU Board of Management on 15 December 2014.

The Plan seeks to assure the technical quality of activities, to identify and integrate international best practices, to increase university involvement in the Agency's activities, and to raise the profile of AQU Catalunya among stakeholders, maintaining the same rigorous approach to its work.

2. Communication

To bolster the presence of AQU Catalunya in social networks, on 19 September an institutional Twitter account (@aqucatalunya) was opened. In the final quarter of 2014, @aqucatalunya gained 369 followers and published 74 tweets, receiving 84 retweets.

Over the course of 2014, AQU Catalunya released 15 institutional **publications**, including the two reports on the survey on graduate employment and methodology guidelines for the different assessment processes for which the Agency is responsible. Six editions of the e-Newsletter were published in 2014 (70-75).

A detailed review of the Agency's **web** content has been conducted, and proposals have been made to improve menu structure and readability.

Work has also been carried out to design the content and appearance of the ***Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya*** ('University Studies in Catalonia') website, which presents the results of external site visits and accreditations of recognised degree programmes, in line with ENQA reporting requirements.



INTERNAL ORGANISATION

During 2014, AQU Catalunya addressed key aspects of accountability and optimisation in the allocation of human and physical resources to its different projects and activities; implemented the NEXUS programme, for quality assurance in teaching assessment, and continued to apply ISO 27001 guidelines on information security management, with a view to achieving full ISO certification in early 2015.



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