

ENQA TARGETED REVIEW

CATALAN
UNIVERSITY
QUALITY
ASSURANCE
AGENCY (AQU
CATALUNYA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This targeted review report analyses the compliance of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, AQU (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, AQU Catalunya) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) following the methodology described in the Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews. The purpose of this targeted review is to ensure AQU's compliance with the ESG in order to renew AQU's membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and its registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review was conducted in the period from September 2021 to May 2022, with an online site visit conducted between 23rd and 25th February 2022.

Established in 1996, AQU is the higher education quality assurance agency of Catalonia. The mission of AQU is to assure the quality of higher education in Catalonia through external quality assurance activities “involving analysis, review and evaluation, certification, audit and accreditation”; and to “safeguard the interests of the society by ensuring that higher education fulfils its potential”. AQU's vision is to be “an independent actor in the university system that works with higher education institutions across Catalonia to assure and enhance the quality of programmes of study, teaching and teaching staff, faculties and schools”, and to be a “knowledge builder at local, national and international levels and to facilitate the quality enhancement of higher education institutions in a global context”.

AQU offers the following external quality assurance activities:

1. Validation, modification, monitoring, accreditation of degree programmes as well as the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the Ex-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes.
2. Ex-post certification of institutional quality assurance systems and institutional accreditation, accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks and the Review of institutions offering foreign degrees.
3. International quality assurance and the Review of institutions offering foreign degrees.

Additionally, AQU contributes to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the teaching staff at higher education institutions in Catalonia by conducting teacher assessment prior to selection by Catalan universities, assessing the individual merits in research and public service, as well as publishing teaching assessment handbooks used in Catalan universities. AQU also conducts a number of studies that provide transversal information on and contribute to the overall quality improvement of the higher education system in Catalonia.

According to the Terms of Reference, this targeted review has evaluated the extent to which AQU continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The focus areas addressed include those ESGs with a partial compliance conclusion in the EQAR Register Committee's decision regarding AQU's previous review, namely ESG 2.6 (Reporting) and ESG 3.3 (Independence). Additionally, ESGs 2.1 have been addressed for all AQU's activities within the scope of ESG's; and the ESGs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.7 have been addressed for the activities that were introduced after the last review of the agency, namely Implementation of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes by AQU, and the Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials. The panel finds AQU compliant on all addressed ESGs.

AQU has selected one enhancement area, ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis). The panel finds that AQU has an extensive range of analyses and studies. Some of these analyses and studies build directly on its external QA activities and others generate alternative sources of data that contribute to the

understanding and enhancement of the Catalan higher education system. As such, not all are to be considered as “thematic analyses” within the strict sense of the standard. The agency demonstrates clear awareness of the distinction. AQU carries out its studies in collaboration with a range of partners and funding sources. The results are disseminated through various online and offline means and are widely appreciated by AQU’s stakeholders.

Summary of agency’s compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3)

ESG	Compliance according to the targeted review ¹	Compliance transferred from the last full review ²
2.1	Compliant	N/A
2.2	Compliant (for new QA activities only)	Substantially compliant → Compliant (for QA activities reviewed during the previous full review only)
2.3	Compliant (for new QA activities only)	Fully compliant → Compliant (for QA activities reviewed during the previous full review only)
2.4	Compliant (for new QA activities only)	Substantially compliant → Compliant (for QA activities reviewed during the previous full review only)
2.5	Compliant (for new QA activities only)	Fully compliant → Compliant (for QA activities reviewed during the previous full review only)
2.6	Compliant	
2.7	Compliant (for new QA activities only)	Fully compliant → Compliant (for QA activities reviewed during the previous full review only)
3.1		Substantially compliant → Compliant
3.2		Fully compliant → Compliant
3.3	Compliant	
3.4		Substantially compliant → Compliant
3.5		Substantially compliant → Compliant
3.6		Fully compliant → Compliant
3.7		Fully compliant → Compliant

Overall, the review panel found AQU to be compliant with the ESG.

¹ Compliance refers to the focus areas that were evaluated in depth and are part of the Terms of Reference, i.e., standards that were only partially compliant with the ESG during the last full review, ESG Part 2 for newly introduced or changed QA activities of the agency, ESG 2.1 for all QA activities and any standard affected by substantive changes since the last full review. If any of the standards of Part 2 of the ESG are covered due to the newly introduced or changed QA activities, a remark “for new or changed QA activities only” is added in brackets to the compliance assessment.

² Compliance refers to the last EQAR Register Committee decision for renewal of inclusion on the Register, or in case when an agency is not renewing its registration in EQAR, compliance refers to the last ENQA Agency Review report and should its judgement differ from that of the panel, the judgement of the ENQA Board, as stipulated in the membership decision letter by the ENQA Board. Compliance refers to the QA activities of the agency that were reviewed during the previous full review.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, AQU (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, AQU Catalunya) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in a period from September 2021 to May 2022 and should be read together with the external review report of the agency's last full review against the ESG.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

Registration on EQAR is the official instrument established by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for demonstrating an agency's ESG compliance. An external review is a prerequisite for registration.

AQU has been a member of ENQA since 2000 and registered in EQAR since 2008. With this review AQU is applying for renewal of ENQA membership and EQAR registration.

As AQU has undergone three successful reviews against the ESG Parts 2 and 3, it is eligible and has opted for a targeted review. The purpose of a targeted review is to ensure the agency's compliance with the ESG by covering standards that were found partially compliant during the agency's last renewal of registration in EQAR in 2017 and on standards that could have been affected by substantive changes³ during the past five years while at the same time further strengthening the enhancement part of the review.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

AQU is carrying out the following activities within the scope of the ESG:

- Validation
- Modification
- Monitoring
- Accreditation
- Institutional accreditation
- Ex-post internal quality assurance system (IQAS) certification
- International quality assurance
- Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
- Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks
- European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
- Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials

The following activities of AQU are outside the scope of the ESG:

- University teaching staff assessment

³ e.g. organisational changes, the launch of new external QA activities.

- Surveys
- International projects.

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), this targeted review will evaluate the extent to which AQU continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The review covers the following areas:

- Those ESGs with a partial compliance conclusion in the EQAR Register Committee's decision regarding AQU's previous review, namely ESG 2.6 (Reporting) and ESG 3.3 (Independence) for all activities of AQU.
- Additionally, ESGs 2.1 to 2.7 for the following activities that were introduced after the last review of the agency, namely Implementation of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes by AQU, and the Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials.
- Additionally, the ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance) will be evaluated for all activities of AQU.
- AQU's self-selected enhancement area: ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis).

The targeted review may also address any matters regarding ESG compliance that come up during the targeted review and that may affect the agency's compliance with the ESG. In the case of AQU's targeted review, the review panel did not identify any matters regarding ESG compliance that would need to be covered apart from the ones listed above and addressed upon in the ToR.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2017 REVIEW

According to the decision of the EQAR Register Committee based on the previous full review conducted in 2017 AQU was found to be in compliance with the following standards.

ESG Part 2: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7

ESG Part 3: 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7

AQU was found to be in partial compliance with ESG 2.6 and ESG 3.3.

The panel acknowledges through the triangulation of evidence that no other changes occurred within the agency and thus acknowledges the status of the following ESG standards from the last full review for those activities that were addressed in the previous full review:

ESG Part 2: 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7

ESG Part 3: 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2022 external targeted review of AQU was conducted in line with the process described in the Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews, the EQAR Procedures for Applications, and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the targeted review of AQU was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Bryan Maguire (Chair), Director of Quality Assurance at QQI, Ireland (ENQA nominee);
- Terhi Nokkala (Secretary), Senior researcher, University of Jyväskylä, Finland (EUA nominee);

- Anna Klampfer, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool, Technical University of Vienna, Austria (ESU nominee).

Milja Homan (ENQA Project and Reviews Officer), acted as the review coordinator. The panel wishes to extend their thanks to Milja Homan for her expertise and valuable support throughout the review process.

This targeted review of AQU began with the tripartite agreement on the Terms of References, followed by AQU preparing and submitting its self-assessment report (SAR). The ENQA review panel received the SAR on 20th December 2021. The briefing meeting with the review coordinator, including input from EQAR, was organised on 20th January 2022. The review panel furthermore held a preparatory meeting with the agency on 4th February 2022 and internal preparatory meetings on 4th and 18th February 2022.

The review panel studied the SAR and all the relevant documentation, and conducted a site-visit to interview AQU's internal and external stakeholders, to add further evidence and clarify various details, as well as to deepen their understanding of the agency. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision was made to conduct the site visit in an online mode from 23rd to 25th February 2022. During the site visit, the review panel met with the agency's management and staff; its decision making and evaluation bodies; as well as the representatives of the government of Catalonia, higher education institutions, reviewers, and stakeholders. The review panel notes that they were not able to interview a representative of the Catalan student union (Consell de l'Estudiantat de les Universitats Catalanes, CEUCAT) as part of the meeting with stakeholders. This was due to the fact that CEUCAT was in process of electing its own decision makers, and thus there was no-one at present with the political mandate to represent CEUCAT. However, the review panel did interview students as members of AQU's Advisory Commission, Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) as well as review panels.

The aim of the meetings conducted during the site visit was to provide further evidence and clarify the information acquired from document material. Based on all the collected information, and the review panels' internal deliberation during and after the site visit, the panel jointly and unanimously produced this review report in the period between 25th February and May 2022. As part of the report writing process, the panel provided an opportunity for AQU to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

Self-assessment report

As described in AQU's self-assessment report (SAR), the process of preparing the SAR was twofold. An internal drafting committee appointed by AQU's director was responsible for collecting the necessary evidence for SAR as well as drafting the text. A self-assessment committee, representing AQU's Governing Board, Advisory Commission, different external stakeholders such as higher education institutions and students, as well as AQU's secretariat, was responsible for reviewing and validating the SAR. The SAR was also reviewed by AQU's internal bodies and external stakeholders, whose views were incorporated in finalising the SAR. The final version of the SAR was approved by the Standing Commission of AQU's Governing Board. The members of the self-assessment committee as well as the drafting committee are listed in Annex I of the SAR.

The SAR described the changes in AQU's operational environment and activities since the previous ENQA review, as well as all the steps AQU had taken pertaining to the different ESGs, including those on which AQU was found compliant in the previous review. Special attention was dedicated to the focus ESGs 2.1, 2.6, and 3.3; which were to be addressed in this targeted review; the ESG

compliance of the new activities introduced since the previous review, as well as the enhancement area chosen by AQU, ESG 3.4. The SAR also included links to all relevant additional documentation and information. Together with the additional documentation, the SAR provided a basis for conducting the targeted review. It should be noted that in many instances, the term commission and the term committee are used interchangeably to refer to various AQU bodies, across AQU's documentation and its website. The Catalan language documentation and website typically use the term commission, while the SAR, and also the previous ENQA review report may use the term committee to refer to the same bodies.

The review panel notes that as this targeted review is among the first ones to be completed, there are, as of yet, no examples of what self-assessment report should contain. On the one hand, the agency has had to present the changes that have taken place in its operational environment and activities, and on the other hand to supply the evidence of its compliance with the ESG, especially pertaining to the focus standards. In terms of ESGs part 2; there is a dual focus of having to go through all the ESGs part 2 for the new activities, and two ESGs (2.1 and 2.6) needing a full account. This balancing act may require further consideration on ENQA and EQAR's part as they develop guidelines for the agencies to prepare SARs for targeted reviews in the future.

Site visit

The site visit was originally planned to take place physically at AQU office in Barcelona, but in January 2022 it was decided unanimously by ENQA, AQU and the review panel that the site visit should take place online instead. This was due to the risk that the global COVID-19 pandemic might jeopardise an in-person visit. In preparation of the site visit, the review panel studied the SAR and the documentation prepared by the agency. The review panel also asked for further documentation before and during the site visit; and these requests were always smoothly and expediently met by AQU.

The online site visit took place between 23rd and 25th of February 2022. Prior to the site visit, the review panel held a preparatory meeting with AQU's designated resource persons. The panel similarly held internal preparatory meetings on 4th and 18th February to plan the interviews as well as to request any additional documentation.

During the site visit, the review panel conducted 11 meetings with the internal bodies and external stakeholders of AQU. These meetings included sessions with the:

- The President, the Director and the Secretary of AQU
- Senior management team of AQU
- AQU staff responsible for the enhancement area
- AQU staff responsible for quality assurance activities
- Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and its specific commissions
- The Governing Board and the Advisory Commission of AQU
- The representatives of the Government of Catalonia
- Vice-rectors of the higher education institutions evaluated by AQU
- Quality assurance officers of the higher education institutions evaluated by AQU
- Reviewers of AQU
- Social Partners of AQU

The meetings during the site visit were conducted using Zoom provided by ENQA. Simultaneous interpretation between English and Spanish/Catalan was available throughout the site visit.

A full list of meetings including the positions of interviewees, can be found in Annex I.

The online site visit took place in a friendly, frank, and open atmosphere. The panel notes that all AQU staff and stakeholders were candid and supportive of both the review process, and the review panel. The panel wants to extend their heartfelt thanks for all involved for the warm welcome they gave to the panel.

CHANGES WITHIN THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The changes in the operational context of AQU pertain, respectively, to the Spanish national legislation and to the specific Catalan higher education. According to AQU's self-assessment report, none of these changes have affected the type of activities carried out by the agency or the composition of the Catalan Higher Education System.

In terms of national legislation, the September 2021 Royal Decree 822/2021 contributed to some changes in higher education that will also have an impact on AQU's work.

The degree, for example, consolidated the three-cycle degree system in Spain. One of the implications of the law was that the length of a bachelor's degrees was consolidated to 240 credits; while there had previously been a possibility to offer bachelor's degrees comprising 180 credits. The Royal Decree similarly changed the assignment of the degree programmes from five to 32 specific knowledge areas. As a result, AQU distributed the knowledge areas amongst the specific commissions of the CAIP: 32 knowledge areas were distributed among specific degree programme assessment committees⁴. In its SAR (p. 36), AQU states that the new legislation *“will require extra efforts to adapt external assessment activities (methodology and computer applications) to the regulatory requirements and deadlines that have been set by the Ministry and which also affect universities. In collaboration with other Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (REACU) agencies, AQU Catalunya is currently analysing the impact of the Royal Decree on its activities and preparing to manage the change in accordance with its quality management system.”*

In order to foster internationalisation of higher education, including creation of joint degrees, the Royal Decree 822/2021 also simplified the related validation, accreditation and quality assurance procedures. The changes in the legislation allow for a recognition of review report issued by another EQAR listed agency, provided that it follows the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

As pertains to the specifically Catalan higher education context, AQU prepared in 2019 the Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework (CHE-QF), of which comprehensive information is available on agency website⁵. The aim of the framework is to facilitate the understanding of the categorisation of higher education qualifications between the Spanish national qualifications framework (MECES), adopted in 2011, and the Catalan higher education system.

AQU'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

Since the review in 2017, AQU has adopted a new strategic plan 2019-2022, according to which AQU's mission stands as follows:

⁴ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/About-us/What-we-do2/News/news/32-knowledge-areas-distributed-among-specific-degree-programme-assessment-committees>

⁵ https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/doc_54247988_1.pdf

“The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya/AQU Catalunya) is an internationally recognised public entity. Its mission is the quality assurance (QA) of higher education in Catalonia in accordance with international quality, academic and social standards, and to safeguard the interests of society in ensuring that higher education fulfils its potential. The Agency’s activities are developed through:

- *The defence of democratic and progressive values in higher education.*
- *The involvement of all social actors in service to the community.*
- *The work and commitment of people who are competent, motivated and satisfied with a job well done.*
- *External quality assurance procedures involving analysis, review and evaluation, certification, audit and accreditation.*
- *International benchmarks and a clear focus on innovation.*
- *The promotion of transparency and public availability in the university system and the actions of the Agency.”*

According to the same document, AQU’s vision stands as follows:

“AQU Catalunya is an independent actor in the university system that works with higher education institutions across Catalonia to assure and enhance the quality of programmes of study, teaching and teaching staff, faculties and schools, for which institutions themselves are ultimately responsible. It works to make a decisive contribution as a knowledge builder at local, national and international levels and to facilitate the quality enhancement of higher education institutions in a global context.”

The strategic priorities laid out in the strategic plan 2019-2022 include the following:

- *“To develop innovative actions that impact higher education and the university system in Catalonia*
- *Facilitate integrated access to quantitative and qualitative data for use in quality assurance and enhancement in the university system in Catalonia*
- *Underpin the international position of both AQU Catalunya and the university system in Catalonia*
- *Maintain the expertise of in-house staff and external experts and contributors so that they feel committed to the activity they are involved in and are capable of embracing change*
- *Have at its disposal the necessary funding and adequate human resources and facilities to address all planned activities.”*

Since the review in 2017, there have been no major changes in the structure or organisation of AQU; including the governing, advisory and evaluation bodies, or its internal structures in the secretariat. The organisation chart, the description of the functions and the composition of each of the bodies, as well as AQU’s internal structure are available on AQU website⁶.

However, pertaining to the recommendation on ESG 3.3. on Independence, AQU has since 2017 separated the membership of the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and its specific commissions; and the membership of the external review panels carrying out the evaluations. Furthermore, AQU has included two new members to the Appeals Commission, both coming from outside the Catalan higher education system.

AQU has appointed a new director since 1st November 2021, as the previous director’s term in office came to an end. The post for a director was filled after an open call.

⁶ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/About-us>

AQU has adopted a new Code of Ethics in 2019, and a guide for incorporating the gender perspective in higher education teaching. Furthermore, AQU has included a consideration of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility to its annual report and action plan.

AQU'S FUNDING

There have been no significant changes in the funding of AQU since the previous evaluation in 2017. AQU is still funded primarily by the Government of Catalonia, which contributes about 90% of the agency's budget. This contribution is allocated to AQU by the Parliament of Catalonia on an annual basis. AQU explains in its SAR that while there is a plan to move to a four-year contract between AQU and the Government of Catalonia; that plan has not been implemented yet.

The remainder of the budget is made up by earmarked project funding from different sources, as well as the fees for assessing the quality and merits of individual academic staff members.

AQU's budget in 2021 was approximately 4,8 million Euros of which the contribution from the Government of Catalonia was approximately 4,3 million Euros.

AQU'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

Since the previous ENQA review in 2017, AQU has begun applying two new forms of external quality assurance; namely the ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/microcredentials, and the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes, both of which are logical continuations to the agency's quality assurance activities and follow the same principles. Additionally, the framework for institutional accreditation has been developed, and the methods for conducting quality assurance activities online during the COVID-19 pandemic have been adopted.

Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/microcredentials

In this activity, short learning programmes (SLPs) refer to courses or modules comprising 4-30 credits, while microcredentials refer to the credential achieved as a result of attending a short learning programme. The SLPs correspond with the levels 2 and 3 under the Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework, and levels 4 and 5 of Spain's National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. SLPs must correspond to labour market needs, be within the strategic framework of the Catalan government, and be especially targeted at non-traditional students. AQU has created criteria and methods for the ex-ante accreditation of SLPs following the principles that are already in place for ex-ante accreditation of programmes. The criteria and methods are available at AQU website on Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes⁷. The panel was told that the process comprises two stages; in the first of which the programmes themselves are assessed in relation to set criteria, and in the second stage the universities who want to offer these programmes are assessed for their capacity to do so. The ex-ante accreditation is valid for six years. By the time of the site visit, the agency had conducted dozens of ex-ante accreditations of short learning programmes, most of them in the field of ICT.

European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes

Following the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes offered jointly by higher education institutions from two or more countries, AQU has developed documents that outline the criteria and processes: namely the Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of

⁷ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Metodologia/Ex-ante-accreditation-of-short-learning-programmes>

joint programme accreditations using the European Approach framework⁸; as well as the Guide to ex-ante accreditation of joint programmes using the European approach⁹. By the time of the site visit, AQU has applied the European approach on two programmes: Master in Global Challenges for Sustainability and Master in Transfusion Medicine and Cellular and Tissue Therapies. The accreditation is valid for six years, with a monitoring process carried out three years after the approval.

External reviews carried out by AQU (SAR p. 10)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
PROGRAMMES					
Validation	94	163	63	71	60
Modification	121	263	258	195	161
Monitoring	164	23	44	55	54
Accreditation	133	140	166	130	210
European Approach for QA of Joint Progr.				1	1
Ex-ante accreditation of SLP				33	<i>Pending</i>
INSTITUTIONS					
Ex-post IQAs certification	--	--	4	6	16
Institutional Accreditation		1	3	7	12
Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks	--	--	--	--	7
INTERNATIONAL					
International quality assurance	--	--	1	--	--
Review of institutions offering foreign degrees	--	--	--	--	--

Other developments

The Royal Decree issued in 2015 enabled university faculties to acquire self-accrediting powers. While AQU envisaged developing the processes for institutional accreditation during the previous ENQA review in 2017, no definitive national framework was in place for this at the time. According to the Royal Decree 640/2021, issued in July 2021, in order to obtain an institutional accreditation, university centres (that is, faculties or schools) have to have renewed the accreditation of at least half of their official bachelor's degree programmes, half of their official master's degree programmes and half of their doctoral degree programmes, and have certified the implementation of their IQAS. Since the previous review, AQU has developed the standards and criteria for institutional accreditation. According to AQU SAR (p. 14) the first institutional accreditations are due to be implemented in 2022.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, AQU also moved all its quality assurance activities online in March 2020, continuing this approach until May 2022. From June 2022 onwards, quality assurance activities will be conducted in a hybrid mode combining online and face-to-face elements.

⁸ https://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_16961289_1.pdf

⁹ <https://www.aqu.cat/ca/doc/guide-to-ex-ante-accreditation-of-joint-programmes-using-the-european-approach>

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AQU CATALUNYA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG) WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

2017 review recommendation

The ENQA review panel stated the following:

- The panel recommends that the agency considers the implications of the close involvement of active HEI representatives in the work of the agency. In particular the impact upon the independence compared to the involvement of more neutral but equally competent stakeholders from other jurisdictions.
- The panel recommends that the agency takes steps to fully separate the roles of the definition and monitoring of procedures on the one hand, and the implementation of those procedures on the other hand.

The EQAR Register Committee stated the following:

The EQAR Register Committee noted the agency's clarifications. While it found that the flag on the independence of the Governing Board was largely addressed, the committee underlined the concerns of the panel with regard to the overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies. The committee therefore could not follow the panel's conclusion of compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 3.3.

Evidence

AQU's independence can be analysed from the perspective of its organisational independence, operational independence, as well as the independence of the formal outcomes of its QA activities.

AQU presents in its SAR (p. 21) that the organisational and operational independence of the agency is assured by the Act 15/2015, of 21 July, which states for example:

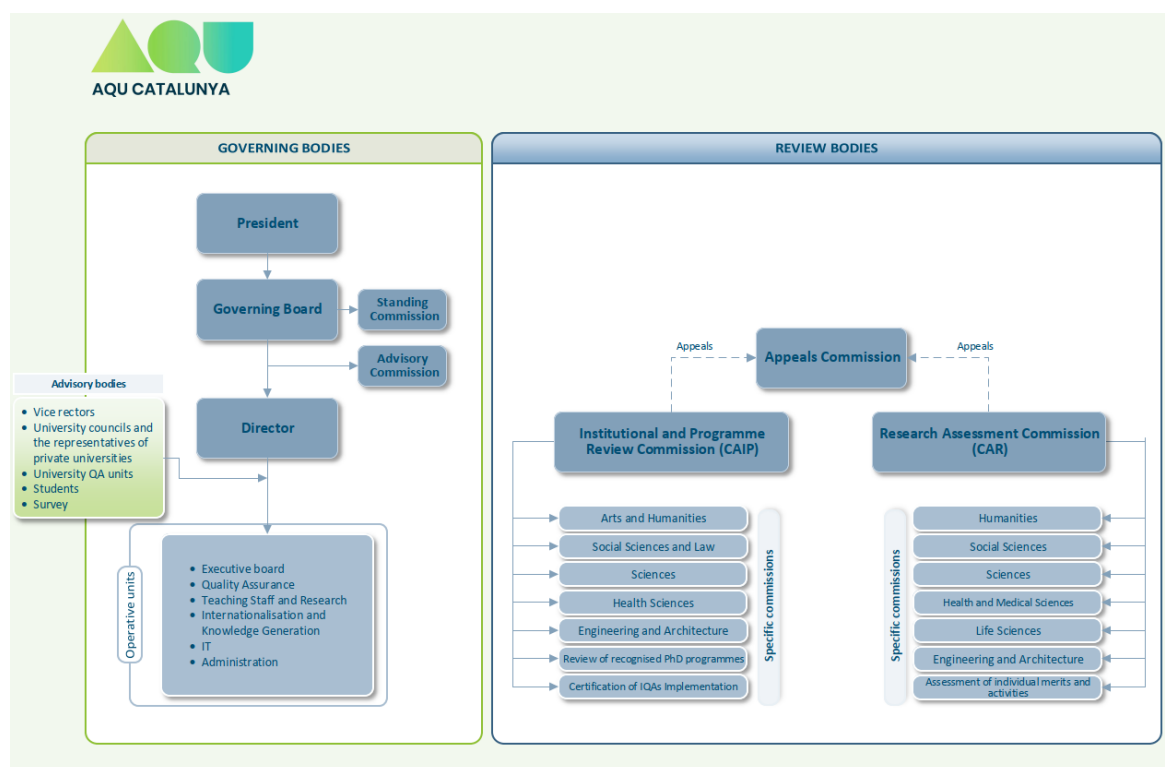
"AQU Catalunya, in the exercise of its functions in the promotion and assurance of quality in higher education, shall act objectively and with technical and professional independence, without instruction from any public administration or other institution in the fulfilment of its objectives" [article 1]

"(...) shall act in accordance with prevailing regulations, with technical and professional independence, develop and endorse the criteria and procedures for quality assurance, accreditation, certification and audit, and undertake in their respective areas review, certification and accreditation that fall to the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, for which they shall be ultimately responsible. The Governing Board shall ensure the technical independence of all QA commissions, committees and panels." [article 18]

Organisational independence

The Organisational independence is based on the Act 15/2015, and further consolidated in the Statutes of AQU Governing Board (Reglament Consell de Direcció)¹⁰, which outline the composition of the Governing Board and its activities, and the composition and process of selecting the Standing Commission, which the Governing Board may appoint from amongst its members following a set of criteria¹¹. The Governing Board comprises the rectors of all Catalan universities; the chairpersons of the social councils of the public universities in Catalonia; three academics chosen by the Inter-university Council of Catalonia; two people representing the government of Catalonia; the chairperson of the Research Assessment Commission (CAR); and two students selected by the Catalonian student union, and two representatives selected by labour organisations; as well as the President and Director of AQU. The Governing Board is chaired by the President of AQU who is the only member of the Governing Board appointed by the Catalan Government; others are members selected by their background organisation (e.g. students, academics, or labour union representatives); or in ex-officio capacity and remain members until their term in office comes to an end, or until they resign from their office, and the resignation is accepted. The AQU secretary is the secretary of the Governing Board. According to AQU's follow-up report dated in June 2019 pertaining to the ENQA review in 2017, as well as according to the explanation given by the AQU secretariat during the site visit, the composition of the Governing Board is mandated by law and is not within AQU's power to change.

AQU's organisation Chart¹² shows that AQU's organisation comprises on the one hand governing bodies (Governing Board, Standing Commission, Advisory Commission, and the Director) and operational bodies (the various departments of the secretariat); and on the other hand quality assurance bodies (Institution and Programme Review Commission CAIP, Research Assessment Commission CAR, their specific commissions, and the Appeals Commission).



¹⁰ https://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_21168479_1.pdf

¹¹ https://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_88845083_1.pdf

¹² <https://www.aqu.cat/en/About-us/Who-are-we/Organisation>

Operational independence

The key to AQU's operational independence lies in its ability to decide upon its own budget allocation, staffing and quality assurance activities. AQU's funding comes primarily in the form of a grant from the Government of Catalonia, and covers the costs of its premises and staff. Additionally, AQU has acquired earmarked funding from specific projects, such as conducting the surveys, from various other organisations, such as banking foundation, Fundació "la Caixa". The Governing Board decides on the budget allocation. AQU can also internally decide upon its own staff. The review panel heard from the AQU secretariat that the fact that AQU can independently appoint all its staff, including the fact that the post for Director was publicly open for applications, has increased the transparency of staffing.

Independence of the formal outcomes of AQU's QA activities

The processes and criteria pertaining to the quality assurance activities conducted by AQU are decided upon by CAIP, independently of the Governing Board; meaning that there is a separation of the strategic decision making from the quality assurance activities. CAIP similarly appoints the ad hoc review panels that carry out the reviews. According to the statutes¹³ of CAIP (p. 1-2), the members comprise the following: *"The director of the Catalan University System Quality Assurance Agency, who acts as the chairperson. b) Up to ten academics with established professional track records. Up to two renowned professionals with experience in the field of quality management. d) Up to two undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral students at a university in the Catalan university system."*

The statutes (p. 2) also outline the term in office and the process of appointing the members: *"The members of the Institutional and Programme Assessment Committee are appointed by the Governing Board, on the proposal of the chair of the Committee, for a period of four years, renewable once and provided they are still students in the case of the members referred to in Article 2.1.d) of these rules of procedure. The members of the CAIP will remain in this role until their successors take office."*

The panel heard from the CAIP members, several of whom come from outside the Catalan higher education system, that they are appointed in individual capacity, rather than as representatives of their organisations. There was ample evidence that the CAIP was in no way "captured" in its decision making by being too close to the Catalan universities.

AQU states in the SAR that the CAIP and its various specific commissions have been separated from the external review panels that undertake the reviews and carry out the visits. There is no overlap in terms of their membership. Furthermore, AQU SAR states that the Appeals Commission is independent both of CAIP and its specific commissions as well as of the review panels; and that in 2020-2021, two new members have been appointed to the Appeals Commission from outside the Catalan higher education system. The Appeals commission comprises one member elected from amongst the members of the Governing Board; who acts as the chair of the Appeals Commission; as well as four other members with academic, scientific or professional prestige and with technical competence, who do not belong to any other committee of the Agency. The members are appointed by AQU's Governing Board for a four-year term. The chair's term is the same as the term of the Governing Board.

In a discussion, AQU's reviewers spontaneously brought up that they are independently able to make their evaluative judgements in the reviews they conduct.

¹³ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Sobre-nosaltres/Estructura-organitzativa/CAIP/Rules-of-procedure-of-the-institutional-and-programme-assessment-committee>

Finally, AQU has adopted a new code of ethics¹⁴ in 2019, which contains provisions to ensure the independence, impartiality, and integrity of its quality assurance activities. These provisions pertain to all AQU experts. When asked by the review panel, all AQU's reviewers acknowledged that they were familiar with the Code of Ethics.

Analysis

One of the foremost concerns of the previous ENQA review on ESG 3.3 was related to whether the Catalan higher education institutions exerted undue influence on AQU through its governing and evaluation bodies.

It is true that as per law, there is a strong representation of the Catalan higher education institutions in the Governing Board of AQU. However, after talking with the AQU staff, stakeholders, and Governing Board representatives, as well as reviewing the statutes and some of the minutes of the Governing Board, it is the understanding of the panel that the Governing Board is not concerned in the matters of quality assurance; but those activities are solely in the mandate of the quality assurance bodies, namely CAIP, its specific commissions, review panels and the Appeals Commission. These aforementioned quality assurance bodies comprise members not only from the Catalan higher education institutions, but also academic representatives from other regions of Spain, as well as from abroad. Similarly, the bodies comprise representatives of students and the labour market.

Another specific point of concern expressed in the previous review was the lack of representatives from outside the Catalan higher education system in the Appeals Commission. According to both written and oral evidence, this situation has now been rectified, as two of the five members of the Appeals Commission come from outside the region.

Furthermore, the panel noted that the members of CAIP and its specific commissions were appointed in individual capacity rather than as representatives of their organisations. The panel discussed with members of CAIP and its specific commissions, who all expressed their understanding that the CAIP acted as an independent body and that its activities were not influenced by the institutional background of its members. The members clearly perceived themselves representing only CAIP and not their background organisations.

Another concern in the previous ENQA review was whether there was an overlap between the roles and the membership between CAIP and its specific commission (and the oversight bodies determining the processes and criteria of quality assurance activities) on the one hand and the review panels (who carry out the quality assurance activities) on the other hand. The panel heard that in response to the panel recommendation in the previous ENQA review pertaining to the overlap of the membership of those bodies, AQU has entirely separated the membership of its strategic and oversight bodies, such as the CAIP and its specific commissions appointed for four years, from the membership of its review panels, which are appointed separately for each review. AQU's review panel members also volunteered the information that they felt they acted independently of any external interference.

The panel finds that the governance design changes, such as for example the addition of non-local members to the Appeals Commission and the separation of the membership of the oversight bodies (CAIP and its specific commissions) from the actual review panels have addressed the concerns expressed in the previous ENQA review in 2017. The panel furthermore checked that no further changes were introduced since the previous review that could have impacted the independence and

¹⁴ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/About-us/How-we-do-it/Code-of-Ethics>

that there were no other issues found by this panel that would cast a doubt on the independence of AQU. It is therefore the panel's view that the three dimensions in this guideline of organisational independence, operational independence and independence of formal outcomes are well secured. This is confirmed not only by the design of the structures but by the experience and feedback of multiple internal and external stakeholders.

Thus, the panel is satisfied that AQU fulfils the standard 3.3 in terms of organisational independence, operational independence, and the independence of the formal outcomes of its quality assurance activities.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The ESGs part 2 are covered in this review as follows:

ESG 2.1 is covered for all activities; as per the general procedure of targeted reviews.

ESG 2.6 is covered for all activities as AQU was found partially compliant in terms of ESG 2.6 in the previous review.

ESGs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7 are covered for the new activities, namely the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the x-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes (SLPs), introduced since the previous review.

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

2017 review recommendation

- The panel recommends the agency reflects on how the concept of student-centred learning may become a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).
- The panel recommends that the agency integrates student admission, progression, recognition, and certification (ESG 1.4) more consistently into the different evaluation procedures.

Evidence (all activities)

AQU carries out a number of external quality assurance activities, both with programme level reviews and institutional reviews. Programme reviews of recognised degrees follow the so called VSMA (Validation, Modification, Monitoring and Accreditation) framework provided for in Spanish law, which consists of a) ex-ante validation of proposals for new programmes, b) monitoring of programme introduction, c) review and evaluation of modifications made to the programme and d) ex-post cyclical programme accreditation.

As defined in the Royal Decree 420/2015, an institutional accreditation can be obtained by a faculty or school, if a minimum of 50% of its bachelor's and master's programmes are ex-post accredited,

and its internal quality assurance system (IQAS) is certified. AQU applies the AUDIT programme, which is a longstanding approach used across Spain that promotes the development and certification of internal quality assurance systems at the level of university centres (faculties or schools). The certification is valid for six years.

In 2021, AQU went through the third round of evaluating the teaching assessment handbooks of the seven public universities in Catalonia. This renewal of the accreditation followed the same framework as the last accreditation in 2013-14.

In addition, AQU offers International Quality assurance as well as the review of institutions offering foreign degrees.

Two new activities were launched since the last ENQA review in 2017, which were communicated to EQAR via a Substantive Change Report on 11/05/2021:

- The ex-ante methodology for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
- Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes

The ex-ante methodology for the European Approach can be understood as a bridge between the European Approach and the Spanish legislation, covering standards which are compulsory for the Spanish system (e.g. Justification). The methodology is applied next to the Standards of the European Approach. AQU also developed conditions for the recognition of joint programme accreditations using the European Approach, if the review is conducted by another agency, to bridge the gap to the Spanish legal requirements for study programmes. The Royal Decree 822/2021 removes barriers for joint programmes in the Spanish higher education system.

The table below provides a mapping grid of the ESG with the corresponding standards, described either as numbers or letters, depending on the activity in AQU's framework, which shows how the agency addresses each standard in the procedures. This table is a shorter version of the complete mapping grid in Annex 5, which was provided by the agency in the SAR. AQU provides comprehensive guidebooks to all its procedures openly available to all on its website.

Analysis

AQU offers the following external quality assurance activities:

1. Programmes
 - a. Validation
 - b. Modification
 - c. Monitoring
 - d. Accreditation
 - e. **European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**
 - f. **Ex-ante accreditation of Short Learning Programmes (SLPs)**
2. Institutions
 - a. Ex-post IQAs certification
 - b. Institutional Accreditation
 - c. Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks
 - d. Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
3. International
 - a. International quality assurance
 - b. Review of institutions offering foreign degrees.

In the following paragraphs, the compliance of AQU's activities, established already during the previous full review, with the ESG Part I is explored. The compliance of the new activities (indicated in bold in the listing above) are analysed separately from the aforementioned activities.

Table 1: Correspondence between AQU's standards and ESGs Part I.

Type/ESG	I.1	I.2	I.3	I.4	I.5	I.6	I.7	I.8	I.9	I.10
Validation / Modification	9	1, 2, 3, 5, 8	3, 5	4	6	7	9	9	9	Procedure
Monitoring	2, 3	1, 3	6		4	5	2	2	Procedure	Procedure
Accreditation	2, 3	1, 3	1, 6	1	4	5	2	2	3	Procedure
SLP	8	5	3, 5	4	6	4, 7	8	8	8	Procedure
European Approach	1	B, C, I	E, I	D, I	F, G, I	G, I	I	H, I	I	Procedure
Ex-post IQAS certification	1, 6	2	2, 3	3	4	3, 5	1, 6	6	1, 2, 3	Procedure
Institutional Accreditation	1	2	5	3	4	6	7	8	2, 7	Procedure
Teaching Assessment	C, D	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	C, D	Not applicable	B, E	C	Not applicable	Procedure
International QA	9	1	1, 6, 7	1, 4	2, 8	3	5	5, 9	Procedure	Procedure
Foreign Degrees	4	4	2	2	3	3	4	1	Procedure	Procedure

1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

AQU's criteria explicitly take the internal quality assurance system into account. The VSMA (Validation, Modification, Monitoring and Accreditation) framework was adapted with the Royal Decree 822/2021, which defines that universities shall act to ensure the quality of their teaching and learning. The institutional accreditation as well as the ex-post certification of the IQAS refer to this standard in their criteria very clearly. The development of their IQAS must include processes for continuous improvement and connects the different external processes, such as the VSMA framework and the AUDIT programme.

The new activities also include explicit standards, which correspond to ESG Standard I.1 and where the institution must prove that they have linked the programme to their internal quality assurance system.

1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes

All programmes offered in the Catalan higher education system must undergo a validation (ex-ante external accreditation procedure) of the programme, in the sense of the VSMA framework. In the further steps (modification, monitoring and accreditation), this standard is covered by the programme's internal quality assurance system. The ex-post review of the IQAS focusses on Dimension 2 on the process of the design, review, and improvement of study programmes of the university and links to the VSMA framework. The review reports studied by the panel reflect this.

The ex-ante assessment of short learning programmes covers this standard by criteria for planning curriculum structure as well as training modules. The procedure for the European Approach covers this via the standards Justification and Knowledge, Skills and Competencies.

1.3 Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

This was an area of concern after the last visit and was explored in depth during the site visit. The VSMA framework as well as the new procedure for SLPs cover this standard by addressing the learning outcomes of the students. The VSMA framework addresses the learning outcomes differently for ex-ante validations and ex-post accreditations. During the ex-ante phase, the focus lies on competencies, their consistency with the profile of the curriculum and the teaching methods applied. In the ex-post phase, the accreditation takes these aspects into account as well, but focuses additionally on graduate labour market/destination indicators and whether the expected MECES levels are achieved by the programmes learning outcomes and teaching methods.

The ex-post review of the IQAS focuses on processes that ensure teaching and learning at the university, as well as on processes to encourage student learning. These aspects are also found prominently in the sampled review reports. The ongoing shift from programme to institutional accreditation brings the notion of student-centred learning closer to the institutions. The student report is incorporated as evidence for the institutional review. It addresses further dimensions of learning, teaching and assessment, and was piloted during two accreditation processes.

A shift towards student-centred learning is noticeable. It has started with the definition of learning outcomes and competencies in the review standards and is now brought into a stronger focus with the Royal Decree 822/2021. At the same time, it was evident in the quality reports reviewed that independent experts were critical of the limited extent to which innovation in teaching and learning was observed in some institutions and programmes. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment may represent a developmental issue in the quality culture, as it requires a shift in the institutions' thinking. The panel feels that AQU is encouraging this developmental process in the institutions. The panel encourages AQU to further this by supporting universities to develop innovative pedagogical formats to help students define their own learning path.

1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Assessment

The criteria for student admission, progression, recognition, and assessment are clearly defined across the VSMA framework and for the new activities. The institutional review focuses on ascertaining that the support structures for the students are in place and functioning in higher education institutions.

1.5 Teaching Staff

Clear criteria have been defined for academic staff across all the quality assurance activities of AQU. For the SLPs, clear criteria on the qualifications of the teaching staff and their training are defined. The criterion also takes the ratio of external to internal teaching staff into account.

1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support

Clear criteria are defined on material resources as well as adequate student support and support staff across all activities. The SLP framework has a very strong focus on checking the adequacy of teaching materials for the SLP in distance learning, with clear requirements formulated, which the programme has to meet.

1.7 Information Management and 1.8 Public Information

The IQAS process addresses both of these standards as applied within the university. The VSMA process addresses information management and communication at the programme level. The focus of information management is the collection of information. AQU has a central role for providing studies and analyses of the higher education system in Catalonia and performing a wide range of surveys. AQU also provides a public information platform (EUC) where students and other

interested parties may easily access information on study programmes, as well as the in-depth review reports.

1.9 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

For the VSMA framework, reaccreditation is necessary after six years. For validation and accreditation, an ongoing process of reflection on the study programme is required internally from the institution every two years. The ex-post institutional accreditation focussed on the review and improvement of the IQAS, taking different dimensions, such as stakeholder involvement, inclusion of the external programme accreditation and decision making into account. The new procedures address this standard by focussing on the IQAS of the institution, where both the Joint Programme and the SLP will be integrated.

1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance

As stated above, the VSMA framework asks for a reaccreditation of the programme every six years, which is also the case for joint programmes. SPLs and institutional accreditation are to be followed up every six years.

Summary

The effectiveness of the internal quality assurance is taken into account in all of AQU's activities that were under review. The shift from programme to institutional accreditation in the Spanish and Catalan higher education system is reflected in the procedures, such as the focus on the IQAS in many procedures. The panel is confident in AQU's ability to provide guidance for the institutions in this shift and also support the path to fostering quality culture.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. The panel would encourage the agency to draw attention in the Catalan higher education system to attend more expansively to student-centred learning, in particular to ensuring that not only are learning outcomes clearly defined but that universities develop innovative pedagogies to help students achieve them.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Evidence (new activities)

AQU publishes the guidelines for the methodologies on its website, together with a link to the corresponding reports. The Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) discussed and approved the methodologies for the European Approach and the short learning programmes, which is reflected in the minutes of different commission meetings studied by the panel. In addition to the guidebooks for the methodologies, the panel analysed the two review reports pertaining to the European Approach and the 33 review reports of the SLPs. The methodologies for the assessment

of the short learning programmes have been developed in close cooperation with the employers, such as the Barcelona Digital Talent, as well as the public employment service of Catalonia, which provides the funding for the short learning programmes. This was verified by the panel during the online site visit. The SLPs will be listed in the public employment service of Catalonia's Service catalogue of specialised training courses. According to the SAR, the opinion of the stakeholders on the new procedures was heard through some of AQU's advisory bodies: Vice-Rector Committee and the QA Units Committee.

The review methodology for the short learning programmes was developed with stakeholders from industry together with the public employer service of Barcelona, as a request from the Catalan Government. The assessment of the short learning programmes is twofold. First, the programme itself is assessed by the ad-hoc assessment committee, which sends its report to the relevant CAIP specific commission, and to the Catalan public employer service. The ad-hoc committee then checks if the institution complies with the criteria, writes a report and sends it to the specific commission as well, which compiles the ex-ante accreditation report. The methodology was designed to offer an ex-ante accreditation of SLPs of 4-30 credits with a manageable workload. It does not consist of a site visit, which is in line with the validation procedure, the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes. The Guidelines for the accreditation of microcredentials -document lists clear requirements the institution has to fulfil. The panel discussed the ex-ante accreditation of SLPs with agency's internal and external stakeholders, who all saw the need for such programmes, which have been developed in close collaboration with the labour markets. AQU's contribution to accrediting SLPs was seen as a very positive sign of AQU's innovation capacity.

AQU's methodology for the European Approach was developed as a bridge between the European Approach and the Spanish legislation and is used together with the Standards for the European Approach. Two guidebooks were created - on the one hand for the ex-ante accreditations of Joint Programmes using the European Approach and on the other hand the Conditions for the recognition by AQU Catalunya of joint programme accreditations using the European Framework. The Royal Decree 822/2021 states that the European Approach may be used in the different stages of the VSMA evaluation process.

Analysis

The methodology for the European Approach was designed with both the European Framework and the local legislation in mind, which led to a framework which bridges these two worlds. The demand for the European Approach in the Catalan higher education area arises through the European University Initiative, such as CHARM-EU. The assessment reports are very clear on the compliance of each framework. Through the legislative change, the European Approach may now be presented in Spain as satisfying the legal requirements for the recognition of degrees. The implementation of the European Approach has, according to AQU as well as its stakeholders, contributed to the internationalisation of the Catalan higher education system and the quality of higher education in Catalonia. The international collaboration between quality assurance agencies has, furthermore, contributed to the organisational learning in AQU.

AQU has shown to be an innovation motor for external quality assurance in Catalonia and Spain, by developing the new methodology for assessing SLPs, applying the European Approach by constructing a bridge between the European framework and the national legislation, and driving the institutional accreditation forward.

The agency continued to ensure compliance with the standard in the course of its pivot to online site visits. Additional observations of the panel is offered on page 36.

Panel commendations

1. The panel commends AQU for successfully adapting its methodology to function online at highly challenging conditions at the outset of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The panel commends the active and innovative engagement with multiple stakeholders in developing a dedicated methodology for the accreditation of SLPs/microcredentials, which is justly seen as an exemplar of good practice in this growing area of economically relevant activity. Methodology was able to bring together credentials from the vocational and HE credentials, as an integrated skills development system.
3. The panel feels AQU is successfully bridging the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the requirements of the Spanish legislation.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

Evidence (new activities)

As stated in AQU's Guidebooks, both the procedures for the accreditation of joint programmes and short learning programmes require a proposal for the programme, which states the relevant evidence for the accreditation. The guidebook for each respective type of evaluation describes the required evidence in detail.

The European Approach asks for a two-day on-site visit, comprising meetings with the management of the institutions and the programme, academics, and prospective employers in the field. If the programme has already run previously, also the representatives of the graduates are met with. After the site visit, an accreditation report in English is written by the review panel. The institutions can propose factual changes to the draft report. Two quality assurance agencies cooperate on the procedure and the accreditation is valid for six years. AQU applies its regular monitoring procedure, which dictates a follow up process after three years.

The procedure for the short learning programmes does not include a site visit. The programme is validated on a paper basis, similar to the validation procedure in the VSMA framework. The programme is assessed by the ad-hoc assessment committee, which reports to CAIP's relevant specific assessment commission (CEA). The institution has the opportunity to review the draft report and propose factual changes. The report is then published on AQU's website. The short learning programmes have to be integrated in the IQAS of the applying university. AQU offers studies on the employability of the alumni of the programmes, which will be expanded to the SPLs. After six years, an ex-post accreditation must be given. If the initial accreditation was issued with conditions, a monitoring report must be submitted after three years.

Analysis

The experience with the European Approach was described by AQU staff as a big learning experience, since AQU's ex-ante accreditations do not include a site visit and the review was conducted in English. AQU has presented itself as a learning organization, which actively wants to improve its own activities. In developing the guidelines for the European Approach, AQU has bridged the gap between the Spanish legislation and the European guidelines. The process for the assessment of short learning programmes is a deliberately shorter version of the validation procedure of the VSMA framework. All steps of the process could be verified with interview partners during the site visit, except for the follow up procedures, since these assessment methodologies are very new.

AQU is a pioneer in Europe with this procedure and industry partners, the Public Employer Service and the government have confidence in the procedure. AQU collects employee data and monitors the employer market. Through the close integration with the Public Employer Service of Barcelona, and the integration of the SLP's in the IQAS of the university, quick adaptations to changing circumstances are possible.

Having interviewed various AQU reviewers and stakeholders, studied the reports published on the programmes accredited using the European approach, as well as the SLPs; the panel concludes that these activities are appreciated both by the reviewers and the stakeholders, they consistently implemented, all reports are published. The processes were appreciated both by AQU stakeholders and reviewers. The international outlook brought to Catalan higher education institutions by AQU's engagement with the European approach and other international activities was also appreciated.

Panel commendations

4. The panel commends AQU upon taking an active role in facilitating internationalisation of the HE system and the using the joint process to change the internal culture of quality assurance in Catalonia in the context of the European Approach. Through their collaboration with other quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions outside Catalonia, AQU is - in the spirit of the ESGs – also fostering the European dimension of quality assurance.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

2. The panel suggests that follow-up of the quality assurance of the short learning programmes is designed in a way as to ensure that there is a continuous collaboration/feedback loop to ensure that the demand from the labour market is met. Furthermore, it is important to include the student feedback into the follow-up process.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

Evidence (new activities)

AQU has taken numerous steps to include non-Catalans in their review processes. The ratio of external to internal experts has consistently gone up in the past years, from 65% to 73%. For the European Approach, ten out of the twelve trained panel experts were from outside the Catalan system. Half of the experts in the ad-hoc assessment committee for SLPs were from outside Catalonia. In addition, AQU has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ESU in 2021 to attract international students for their reviews. A student from the ESU pool was appointed as one of the experts for the European Approach and confirmed in interview that the student voice was well heard in the process. These measures are in line with the recommendations of the previous ENQA review. AQU has also undertaken a number of measures to ensure that their experts are up-to-date with their procedures, with the use of specific and updated training, as was recommended by the previous review. Every new expert, who enters a review panel, commission or committee must undergo initial training with AQU. According to SAR, the ESGs are delivered to the reviewers together with their review assignment.

The ad hoc assessment committee for SLP proposals consists of two academic members, one of which, preferably a professor, is the chair of the committee, additionally two persons of professional standing, one student and one QA methodologist, typically from AQU staff, who can advise on the process but does not have voting rights. The methodologist is appointed from among AQU's technical staff. The review panel is nominated by the Chair of CAIP.

For the European Approach, the basic composition is to appoint seven experts: three academic reviewers, one professional, one student and a secretary appointed from AQU's technical staff. In one case, the review included an additional observer from the partner agency (NVAO) and in the other, a fourth academic reviewer.

For the new procedures, three training sessions were offered. All reviewers must comply with AQU's principles of action and its Code of Ethics. The reviewers have access to the relevant assessment material, as well as the European Standards and Guidelines to their disposal. The reviewers reported to the panel their satisfaction with the level and type of training received and with the support that they received from agency staff in carrying out their work.

Analysis

AQU has selected the experts for both new activities from their pool of reviewers. For the new activities, AQU has appointed a balanced number of experts internal and external to Catalonia. All experts involved in the assessment procedures with the new activities were trained and the experts present at the site visit were familiar with the Code of Ethics. The panel's view is that the method of selection and training of the panels is fit for purpose. Panels are carefully selected and well aware of the nature of their task and the importance of giving an independent and unbiased judgment based on evidence.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

Evidence (new activities)

AQU has comprehensive review guidebooks for all their activities. They describe the criteria, procedures, and dimensions clearly. In addition, they provide guidance on the evidence the institution should provide, or the review panel may look into, in order to ensure evidence-based decision making. The CAIP, with its specific commissions, is AQU's decision-making body in terms of its quality assurance work. The consistency of the application of the criteria is ensured by consistently training and retraining the peer review experts and the commission members, and by having a commission secretary appointed by the commission from amongst AQU's technical staff in all the meetings.

The outcome for the ex-ante accreditation of SLPs may be favourable or unfavourable, for the accreditation with the European Approach compliant, compliant with conditions, or non-compliant. The criteria to be addressed for an SLP are:

- Programme description
- The justification for its creation
- The internal quality assurance system (IQAS)
- The objective and learning outcomes
- Student access and admission, and student support
- Planning
- Teaching and support staff
- Material resources and services
- Expected outcomes.

Experts who had participated in the evaluations, and the stakeholders from the the labour market, reported that the criterion relating to the occupational relevance of the SLPs/microcredentials received particular attention.

The criteria for the European approach implemented by AQU mirror those laid down in the European document which the agency has mapped in its handbook. Each of the nine criteria are separately evaluated as follows:

- A. Programme description
- B. Justification
- C. Knowledge, skills, and competences
- D. Student access and admission
- E. Study programme (curriculum)
- F. Academic staff
- G. Material resources and services
- H. Expected outcomes
- I. Quality assurance system

The handbook contains guidance on which sources of evidence should be evaluated against guidance. The reviewers interviewed were familiar with the handbook and criteria. A reviewer noted the challenge of interpreting the criteria across the range of participating institutions with their various national traditions but affirmed that AQU staff had been helpful clarifying questions about the process during training.

Analysis

All guidebooks are written in a clear language and make the methodology accessible also to those people who are not experts on quality assurance. They are easy to find and publicly available on AQU's website. All the assessment decisions are made by a commission of independent experts via the CAIP and its specific commissions, ensuring consistency. In addition, every expert panel is accompanied by a secretary without a vote and offering guidance on the application of the standards. The new activities also support extensive guidebooks, where the process is laid out clearly for both the institutions, the review panel and the decision-making body to follow. The established good practice of producing comprehensive handbooks appears to have been successfully extended to the two new processes. The consistency of reporting for both processes indicates that the criteria have been understood and applied.

For the new processes the outcomes so far have been positive. This is to be expected as these are high stakes pilot cases for both the European approach and the SLPs and they have evidently received very close attention from the universities and from the agency. However, there is no reason to think that the criteria have not been applied rigorously.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

2017 review recommendation

- The panel recommends the agency should publish all reports, including the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful.
- The panel recommends the agency offers all available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders, including students and employers.

The EQAR register committee stated the following:

While the Register Committee acknowledged AQU's efforts to improve the readability and accessibility of reports for its target audience the Committee concluded that the flag has only been partially addressed, since AQU still does not publish all reports. The Committee was thus unable to concur with the review panel's conclusion of (substantially) compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 2.6.

Evidence (all activities)

AQU publishes all its reports on the EUC informs portal¹⁵, which provides easily accessible information to the public. It provides basic information about every degree (credits, mode of delivery, municipality), links the webpage of the university, and provides, next to all the available assessment reports of the programme, the accreditation outcomes in an understandable way, as well as the quality label. Users may use different filter options, e.g. educational level, field, sub-field of knowledge and university, to optimise the search result. The EUC informs portal was not yet updated to host the review reports for the SLPs, which for now are published directly on AQU's website.

The reports are also published via the Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)¹⁶, with AQU publishing the reports for validation, accreditation, modification and institutional accreditation automatically with over 3350 reports available. In addition, the release of the review reports of the ex-ante accreditation of SLP's is already working.

AQU publishes all review reports, independent of their outcome. This practice is now well accepted within the higher education community, as could be verified during the site visit. Although this practice is not comfortable for the institutions, they see it as a tool to ensure accountability and trust in the whole system. Negative reports are released with an initial page warning that the degree will not be taught.

The accreditation reports (two cases to date) for the European approach to Joint Programmes process are published In English. For each of the nine European approach standards the reports make separate judgements on compliance: compliant; compliant with conditions; or non-compliant. There are also recommendations where relevant. These are accompanied by a rationale. For each condition or recommendation the response of the universities is included. The legal certificate required under the new Spanish legislation to give effect to the European approach is also published. The reports document routine Information regarding the process, the panel members and the site visit.

The accreditation reports for the SLPs are published in Catalan. There are two stages to this process, each of which leads to a report. The first report deals with the generic design specifications of the SLP. There is one such report for each proposed occupational microcredential. There is then a separate report for each university proposing to offer the credential verifying that institution applying to deliver the SLP complies with the specifications in terms of teaching and support staff, its internal quality assurance system and the material resources defined in the proposal. The universities confirmed their expectations that these evaluations would be abbreviated. At each phase these reports are very short. They contain affirmations of compliance against each the relevant criteria. The reports on specifications also contain recommendations for improvement in most cases. These reports are signed by the panel chair but do not list the panel members or contain any details regarding the process of evaluation. Reviewers noted that the similarity between reports was due in part to working from a common template.

Analysis

AQU addressed the first recommendation from the last visit by publishing the negative reports, a practice which is now well accepted by the higher education community, who see it as a measure to ensure accountability and trust, as well as shine a positive light on the Catalan system, since many more positive reports are released than negative. Through the publication of the initial disclaimer

¹⁵ <http://estudis.aqu.cat/informes?idioma=en-US>

¹⁶ <https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-institution/>

page for the negative reports, AQU ensures that there is no misunderstanding on the outcome of the assessment.

The reports on external QA provided by AQU are published with further information on the degree and the university, thus providing a one-stop shop platform for potential students and interested public to inform themselves. For each programme there are user-friendly summaries of the accreditation outcomes under various criteria alongside links to the sequence of reports relating to the programme. The catalogue also provides information relating to the programme drawn from other sources including student satisfaction, labour market outcomes, admissions and persistence data. This is a very powerful example of the integration of the outcomes of external QA with other reliable data sources to inform student course choice. The EUC platform is clearly structured and has a comfortable user experience and, in the opinion of the panel, is an example of best practice across Europe.

The reports for the new processes contain the expected elements. The European Approach reports offer a detailed evaluation of these inevitably complex proposals and include valuable observations for their implementation. They are similar to reports in other jurisdictions in how they implement the European Approach, reflecting AQU's close collaboration with other agencies in this work.

Agencies generally struggle to identify how to scale the demands of accrediting short programmes, and this includes ensuring that the reports are of proportionate length and detail. The two-stage approach of AQU is innovative but has resulted in reports that are very short and not very informative. In many cases there is no analytic rationale provided for a judgment of compliance with individual criteria and the reports read as rather formulaic. The first stage (design) reports do not seem to do justice to the detailed evaluation work that we heard to experts speak of, particularly as regards how the programmes address the needs of the labour market. Both sets of reports lack necessary information regarding panel composition.

Panel commendations

5. The panel commends AQU for the implementation of the EUC informs portal, which provides easily accessible information on all degrees in Catalonia, as well as in depth reports and further links.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

3. The reports published on the ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes are very brief. The panel suggests that AQU consider providing more descriptive and contextual information on the SLPs in order to facilitate their better usability by various stakeholders, including prospective students.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Evidence (new activities)

According to the SAR, AQU has in the past two years increased the number of the Appeals Commission members from three to five; thus being able to include two members from outside the Catalan higher education system. In this manner AQU has responded to the recommendation given by the previous review on standard 2.7. This analysed in greater detail on pages 15-16 under ESG 3.3.

According to the AQU SAR, persons or institutions who disagree with the outcome of a review may appeal with the Appeals Commission following the procedure published in AQU's website. AQU has produced two documents which outline the procedure: Procedure for rulings in cases of appeal and the issue of review reports on judgments entered by review, certification and accreditation panels and committees¹⁷ and Rules of internal procedure of AQU Catalunya's Appeals Committee¹⁸. The activities of the appeals committee and the outcomes of its deliberations are presented in the annual reports. The documentation is readily accessible. In general, very few external QA decisions are appealed and there have been no appeals so far relating to the new processes under consideration.

The handbook for the ex-ante accreditation of SLPs (section 2.1.3) outlines the role of the appeals committee in the determination of the final outcomes of the procedure. It notes the need for the committee to have access to the reports of Independent experts, preferably from outside Catalonia. The right to appeal is clearly flagged in the process description summary on the agency website.

AQU has an open channel, called the Help Desk¹⁹, on their website. The help desk function allows correspondents to distinguish between consultations/queries on the one hand and complaints/claims on the other. University stakeholders indicated that the agency is responsive to feedback.

By the time of the site visit, AQU has not received any appeals or complaints on the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes or ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes.

Analysis

All the complaints and appeals are dealt with through the same procedures, regardless of the type of quality assurance activity they pertain to. This holds true also to the two new activities.

The panel was told in the interviews that the composition of the Appeals Committee has been changed to include members from outside the Catalan higher education system, in order to act upon the recommendation by the previous review panel.

Panel conclusion: compliant

¹⁷ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Procediment-resolucio-recursos-alcada-i-informes-de-revisio>

¹⁸ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Sobre-nosaltres/Estructura-organitzativa/Comissio-d-apel-lacions/Reglament-de-funcionament-intern-de-la-comissio-d-apel-lacions>

¹⁹ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/formularis/Help-desk>

ENHANCEMENT AREAS

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

AQU has an extensive range of analyses and studies. Some of these build directly on its external QA activities and others generate alternative sources of data that contribute to the understanding and enhancement of the Catalan higher education system. As such, not all are to be considered as “thematic analyses” within the strict sense of the standard. The agency demonstrates clear awareness of the distinction. It also presents separately the reports on its reviews of the external QA processes themselves which are an aspect of continuous improvement. Some of the most informative reports combine data from external QA activities with data from other sources such as labour market insertion surveys.

The comparative reports produced jointly with other Spanish agencies through REACU clearly fall within the scope of thematic analysis as outlined in standard 3.4. The two disciplines presented in 2021 are the master’s degrees in infant and primary education, and informatics and telecommunications. The findings of external quality assurance activities by the agencies, including those of AQU, are analysed quantitatively and qualitatively and used as the basis for broad-ranging and useful conclusions on the national level.

AQU produces cross-sectional reports on fields of studies in Catalonia. The fields covered include masters in secondary education (2021 and 2015), design (2021), engineering in industrial sectors and logistics (2018), and nursing (2017). These build on the findings of reports from the VSMA cycle and are within the scope of the standard 3.4. The agency publishes executive summaries of these reports in English as well as the main report in Catalan. It would be helpful if English language summaries of other reports (e.g., the REACU studies) were also translated.

The studies carried out by AQU are well embedded within the work of the organisation and within the wider informational environment regarding Catalan HE. For example, AQU’s Catalan Talent Observatory which aims “to provide, in a summarised and readily understandable way, the main characteristics of job offers in Catalonia including, for example, the occupations in most demand, the skills and abilities required, together with other characteristics such as the type of contract and salaries that are offered” is clearly not in scope for the ESG. This information however complements the Estudis Universitaris de Catalunya - EUC²⁰ which is the main portal for accessing the reports of external quality assurance activity which enhances their usefulness to learners and other stakeholders. The EUC in turn provides links to the Universities Channel²¹. These activities are not within the scope of standard 3.4 but this does not lessen their value to the Catalan university system.

The mandate for choosing topics for thematic analysis was quite strong. External stakeholders, including the inter-university council, play a role in identifying topics that are of particular policy relevance. The topics are generated on a two-year planning cycle. As an example of a topic with high policy relevance the panel can cite the cross-sectional reports on the University Master’s Degree in Teacher Training. Ministry and university representatives were highly appreciative of the timeliness and relevance of these reports in contributing to much needed reform of the teacher education system. The agency is to be commended on how it balances responsiveness to issues of public policy importance with maintaining independence and scientific rigour in the way in which presents evidence to inform those debates.

²⁰ <https://estudis.aqu.cat/euc/ca/Comu/Inici>

²¹ <https://universitats.gencat.cat/>

The resources for thematic analysis are adequate. The agency has the necessary skill set and plan carefully to ensure that their workload is properly balanced. The major (non-ESG) research studies, such as the triennial employers survey are scheduled in different years than the thematic analyses. Funding for studies comes from a variety of sources, including the core grant from the government, university subscriptions and charitable foundations. This diversity of funding sources brings advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it allows stakeholders to demonstrate support and commitment to the work. On the other hand, it may not be stable. If the funders' priorities or own resources change, then the research may not continue. . In some cases the value of the studies are enhanced by being assembled in series over time and this element would be compromised if the series were interrupted through lack of resource. The agency and the ministry need to ensure that the valuable work of producing these studies continues to be fully resourced.

AQU carries out its studies in collaboration with a range of partners. These include the universities, and university networks such as the Vives Network of Universities from Catalanian and neighbouring regions for the Via Universitaria Study, foundations (la Caixa, for the Catalan Talent Observatory and the survey of employers), and other quality assurance agencies in Spain through the thematic analyses of REACU. This allows the agency to participate in a large range of studies and also to have a wider impact from these studies as their collaborators also contribute to their dissemination.

The results of the studies are disseminated in the first instance through a clearly presented website. This is complemented by conferences and webinars for interested audiences. The webinars in particular during the period of the pandemic have enabled the engagement of a bigger number of participants. This was very much appreciated by the universities.

AQU is planning to introduce a database of good practices in relation to teaching for employability. This is a promising development. While strictly speaking this is neither an analysis nor a study, it is an innovative way of exploiting the fruits of Catalan quality assurance to promote improvement in the university system and improve its relevance to the labour market. Highlighting good practice will give positive feedback to innovative teachers and should allow their experience to serve as a resource for peers. The agency should plan to monitor the uptake and impact of this database to determine whether it achieves those objectives.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

COVID PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND VIRTUAL QA

The Catalan university system, like others across the world, had to react quickly in 2020 to the spread of Covid-19. This entailed changes to the way in which higher education was delivered and to the manner in which it was quality assured. AQU played a leading role in this response. This was commented on by stakeholders. The universities appreciated the guidance that was offered by AQU during the pandemic.

AQU pivoted its quality assurance activities to online mode very efficiently. Visits were conducted online as were training and dissemination activities. It was helped in this change by its solid IT infrastructure. University stakeholders commented positively on the increased participation in discussion of the outcomes of quality assurance activities that arose from webinars organised by AQU.

The impact of Catalan students during the pandemic was variable. While they experienced innovative pedagogical formats, their satisfaction levels were lower. Emergency remote learning cannot be expected to have similar positive effects to carefully planned and implemented change. It remains to be seen whether quality assurance activities can detect what long-term impacts, if any, the pandemic period has on teaching practices and quality.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 2.2

1. The panel commends AQU for successfully adapting its methodology to function online at highly challenging conditions at the outset of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The panel commends the active and innovative engagement with multiple stakeholders in developing a dedicated methodology for the accreditation of SLPs/microcredentials, which is justly seen as an exemplar of good practice in this growing area of economically relevant activity. Methodology was able to bring together credentials from the vocational and HE credentials, as an integrated skills development system.

3. The panel feels AQU is successfully bridging the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the requirements of the Spanish legislation.

ESG 2.3

4. The panel commends AQU upon taking an active role in facilitating internationalisation of the HE system and the using the joint process to change the internal culture of quality assurance in Catalonia in the context of the European Approach. Through their collaboration with other quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions outside Catalonia, AQU is - in the spirit of the ESGs – also fostering the European dimension of quality assurance.

ESG 2.6

5. The panel commends AQU for the implementation of the EUC informs portal, which provides easily accessible information on all degrees in Catalunya, as well as in depth reports and further links.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, AQU Catalunya is in compliance with the ESG.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

ESG 2.1

1. The panel would encourage the agency to draw attention in the Catalan higher education system to attend more expansively to student-centered learning in particular to ensuring that not only are learning outcomes clearly defined but that universities develop innovative pedagogies to help students achieve them.

ESG 2.3

2. The panel suggests that follow-up of the quality assurance of the short learning programmes is designed in a way as to ensure that there is a continuous collaboration/feedback loop to ensure that the demand from the labour market is met. Furthermore, it is important to include the student feedback into the follow-up process.

ESG 2.6

3. The reports published on the ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes are very brief. The panel suggests that AQU consider providing more descriptive and contextual information on the SLPs in order to facilitate their better usability by various stakeholders, including prospective students.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	INTERVIEWED PERSONS
4th February 2022		
10.00-12.00	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit	
12.00-14.30	An online clarifications meeting with the agency's resource person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQU's secretary • Head of Quality Assessment Department • Technical Advisor
18th February 2022		
13.00-15.00	Review panel's pre-visit meeting and preparations for day 1	
23rd February 2022		
08.30	Review panel's private meeting	
09.00-09.45	Meeting with the Director and President of AQU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQU president • AQU director • AQU's secretary
09.45-10.00	Review panel's private discussion	
10.00-10.45	Meeting with representatives from the Senior Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQU's secretary • Head of Quality Assessment Department • Head of International and Knowledge Department • Head of Teaching and Research Department • Legal advisor • Technical advisor • Head of internal quality assurance
10.45-11.00	Review panel's private discussion	
11.00-11.45	Meeting with the agency staff on the agency's self-selected enhancement area ESG 3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Quality Assessment Department • Head of International and Knowledge Department • Project manager of Knowledge Department • Project manager of Quality Assessment Department • Project manager of Knowledge Department • Project manager Quality Assessment

TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	INTERVIEWED PERSONS
		Department
11.45-12.45	<i>Lunch break</i>	
12.45-13.45	<i>Review panel's private discussion</i>	
13.45-14.30	Meeting with staff in charge of external QA activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project manager Quality Assessment Department • Project manager Quality Assessment • Project manager Quality Assessment • Project manager Quality Assessment • Legal advisor
14.30-14.45	Review panel's private discussion	
14.45-15.30	Meeting with the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and its specific commissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of CAIP • (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, president of the specific commission for the Certification of IQAS implementation) • Member of CAIP (Universitat Jaume I, president of the specific commission for Social Sciences and Law) • Member of CAIP (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, president of the specific commission for Arts and Humanities) • Member of CAIP • (Universitat de Barcelona, student) • Member of CAIP • (academic member, Universidade do Porto, academic member)
15.30-15.45	Review panel's private discussion	
15.45-16.30	Meeting with AQU Governing Board and Advisory Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governing Board, rector Universitat Ramon Llull • Governing Board, rector Universitat de Barcelona • Governing Board, rector Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya • Advisory Commission, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya • Advisory Commission, Universidad Politècnica de Madrid, quality assurance expert

TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	INTERVIEWED PERSONS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory Commission, Universitat de Barcelona, student
16.30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day 2	
24th February 2022		
08.00-09.00	Review panel's private meeting	
09.00-09.30	Meeting with the representatives of the Catalan Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of Universities in the Catalan Government Deputy Director of Universities in the Catalan Government
09.30-09.45	Review panel's private discussion	
09.45-10.30	Meeting with representatives of some reviewed HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vicerector, Universitat de Barcelona Vicerector, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya Vicerector, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Vicerector, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya Vicerector, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya Vicerector, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
10.30-10.45	Review panel's private discussion	
10.45-11.30	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat de Barcelona Alliance manager, Universitat de Barcelona Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Quality Assurance Officer, Universitat de Lleida
11.30-12.30	<i>Lunch break</i>	
12.30-13.30	<i>Review panel's private discussion</i>	
13.30-14.15	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewer, Universidad de Deusto, Certificación of IQAS Reviewer, Universidad de Mondragón,

TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	INTERVIEWED PERSONS
		Certificación de IQAS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewer, Universidad de Castilla la Mancha, microcredential • Reviewer, Universidad de Vigo, programme accreditation • Reviewer, professional, microcredential • Reviewer, student at the Universidad Internacional de Valencia, programme accreditation-WFME • Reviewer, Ph.D. student, University of Camerino; European Approach process
14.15-14.30	Review panel's private discussion	
14.30-15.15	Meeting with AQU's social partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Service of Catalunya • Coordinador of the University Master's Degree in Teacher Training for Secondary and Upper-Secondary Education, Vocational Training and Foreign Language Teaching • Xarxa Vives, Via universitaria survey • Engineer Observatory Project • Head of Strategy and Operations at Mobile World Capital Barcelona • Director of R&I Department in Fundació "la Caixa"
15.15-15.30	Review panel's private discussion	•
15.30-16.15	Session to clarify any pending issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQU's secretary • Head of Quality Assessment Department • Head of International and Knowledge Department • Project manager Quality Assessment
16.15	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day 3 and provisional conclusions	
25th February 2022		
09.00-12.30	Meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
12.30-13.00	Final de-briefing meeting with president and staff of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AQU president • AQU director • AQU secretary • Head of Quality Assessment Department • Head of International and Knowledge

TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	INTERVIEWED PERSONS
		Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Teaching and Research Department • Legal advisor • Technical advisor • Head of internal quality assurance

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

Targeted review of Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) against the ESG

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

The present Terms of Reference were agreed between AQU (applicant), (ENQA) (coordinator) and EQAR.

1. Background

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 04/03/2008 is applying for renewal of EQAR registration based on a targeted external review against *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) has been a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2000 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

AQU is carrying out the following activities within the scope of the ESG:

- *Validation*
- *Modification*
- *Monitoring*
- *Accreditation*
- *Institutional accreditation*
- *Ex-post IQAs certification*
- *International quality assurance*
- *Review of institutions offering foreign degrees*
- *Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks*
- *European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes*
- *Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials*

All these activities are included on the agency's profile on the EQAR website and linked to DEQAR database. NB: The agency may not upload reports from other activities to DEQAR.

The following activities of the applicant are outside the scope of the ESG:

- *University teaching staff assessment*
- *Surveys*
- *International projects*

These activities are not relevant to the application for renewal on EQAR..

2. Purpose and scope of the targeted review

This review will evaluate the extent to which AQU continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The targeted review aims to place more focus on those parts that require attention and provide sufficient information to support AQU's application to EQAR.

The review will be further used as part of the agency's renewal of membership in ENQA.

2.1 Focus areas

- A) Standards with a partial compliance conclusion in the [Register Committee's last renewal decision](#):
 - a. *ESG 2.6: Reporting* and
 - b. *ESG 3.3 Independence*.
- B) Standards 2.1 to 2.7 for the following activities that were introduced after the last review of the agency ([see AQU's Change Report](#)):
 - a. Implementation of the *European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes* by AQU (where applicable, i.e. if and when AQU's practice differs from the Agreed Standards and the Agreed Procedure, given that these are aligned with the ESG).
 - b. *Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials*.
- C) ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance for all activities of AQU;
- D) Selected enhancement area: ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis
- E) Other matters regarding ESG compliance that come up during the targeted review and that may affect the agency's compliance with the ESG (if any).

These issues should be investigated by the review panel as far as possible, providing an analysis and conclusion on the ESG standard(s) concerned.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications* and *the Policy on Targeted Reviews*, and following the methodology described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Agreement on the Terms of Reference between EQAR, AQU and ENQA;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Self-assessment by AQU including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AQU;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Analysis of the final review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee;
- Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board;
- Attendance to the online follow-up seminar.

3.1 Independence of the review coordinator

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has not provided remunerated (e.g. consultancy) or unremunerated services to AQU during the past 5 years, and conversely AQU has not provided any remunerated or unremunerated services to ENQA.

3.2 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of at least 3 members including an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member and one other expert. At least one of the three members is from another country.

The third panel member should be a quality assurance professional that is currently employed by a QA agency and has been engaged in quality assurance within the past five years. When requested by the agency under review or when considered particularly pertinent, a second quality assurance professional or other stakeholders (for example, a representative of the labour market) may be included in addition to the three panel members. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

One of the members serves as the chair of the review panel, and one as the review secretary. At least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. At least two panel members come from outside the national system of the agency under review (if relevant).

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator will not be the secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitae of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

Once appointed, ENQA will inform EQAR about the appointed panel members.

3.3 Self-assessment by AQU, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

AQU is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

The self-assessment report is expected to contain:

- a description of the self-assessment process and the production of the SAR;
- a description of changes occurred within the agency since the last full review, including any eventual changes in the higher education system and quality assurance system in which the agency predominantly operates, the agency's structure, funding, its list of external quality assurance activities within the scope of the ESG, as well as the changes in the agency's quality assurance activities abroad (where relevant);

a section that addresses the focus areas of the review, including standards that were considered to be partially compliant with the ESG in the last full review as well as ESG 2.1 and one self-selected ESG standard for enhancement (see

- **2.1 Focus areas**);
- a SWOT analysis of the agency as a whole;
- for each of the individual standards enlisted above (see section 2) a consideration of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal (if applicable).

The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AQU fulfils its tasks of external quality

assurance and continues to meet the ESG and thus the requirements for EQAR registration.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*, is present. If the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

3.4 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule considering the aspects included under the focus area (as defined under point 2.1 of the Terms of Reference).

The schedule will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit. The approved schedule shall be given to AQU at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The site visit should enable the review panel to explore how the agency has addressed the standards where it has been found to be partially compliant (if the case), aspects of substantive change, consideration of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1) and the self-selected ESG standard(s) for enhancement. The panel will include extra time during the site-visit to address any other arising issues (if the case) that might have an impact on the agency's compliance with the ESG.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency.

Prior to the physical site visit, the panel attends a joint briefing call between the panel, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and EQAR to clarify the review expectations and address any possible arising matters.

In advance of the site visit (at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;

- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

3.5 Preparation and completion of the final review report

The review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR²².

The external report will present the facts and analysis reflecting the reality at the time of review. This will form the main basis for the Register Committee's decision making.

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language. After panel has considered coordinator's feedback, the report will go to the agency for comment on factual accuracy. If AQU chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report.

Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by AQU and submit the document for scrutiny to ENQA's Agency Review Committee and then to EQAR along with the remaining application documents (self-evaluation report, Declaration of Honour, statement to review report-if applicable). The report is to be finalised normally within 2-4 months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 30 pages in length. All panel will sign off on the final version of the external review report. ENQA will provide to AQU the [Declaration of Honour](#) together with the final report.

4. Publication and use of the report

AQU will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the ENQA Agency Review Committee has validated the report. Prior to the final validation of the report, the ENQA Agency Review Committee may request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

ENQA will retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the review panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, will be vested in ENQA. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

²² See here: <https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/UseAndInterpretationOfTheESGv2.0-2015.pdf>

5. Decision-making on EQAR registration and ENQA membership

The agency will submit the review report via email to EQAR before expiry of the agency's registration on EQAR. The agency will also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), the Declaration of Honour and any other relevant documents to the application to EQAR (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in autumn 2022. The Register Committee's final judgement on the agency's compliance with the ESG as a whole can either be substantially compliant (approval of the application) or not substantially compliant (rejection of the application). In case of a positive decision (substantially compliant with the ESG), the registration is renewed for a further five years (from the date of the review report).

The decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board will take place after EQAR Register Committee decision.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency's membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA's website.

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	September 2021
Appointment of review panel members	September 2021
Self-assessment report (SAR) completed by AQU	30 November 2021
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	December 2021
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2021/January 2022
Briefing of review panel members	January 2022
Review panel site visit	Second half of February 2022
Submission of the draft review report to ENQA Review Coordinator	Mid-March 2022

Factual check of the review report by the AQU	Mid-April 2022
Statement of AQU to review panel (if applicable)	Late April 2022
Submission of review report to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	Early May 2022
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	June 2022
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by AQU	November 2022
Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board	December 2022

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AQU Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency

CAIP Institutional and Programme Review Commission

CEUCAT Student council body for Catalan universities

CHE-QF Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework

ENQA European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG European Standards and Guidelines for the external Quality Assurance of Higher Education 2015

ESU European Students Union

EQAR The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EUC University Studies of Catalonia web portal

HE higher education

HEI higher education institution

IQAS Internal quality assurance system and quality and information security management system

MECES Spanish Higher Education Qualifications Framework

NVAO Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

QA quality assurance

REACU Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

SAR self-assessment report

SWOT Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

VSMA Framework for validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQU

Act 15/2015, of 21 July, On Agència Per A La Qualitat Del Sistema Universitari De Catalunya.

Action Plan 2022

Action Plan 2021

AQU Catalunya Catalogue of Services

AQU Catalunya Corporate Social Responsibility Annual Report Summarised Version 2019

AQU Catalunya Expectations on the Enhancement Standard 3.4.

AQU Catalunya Self- Assessment Report 2021

AQU Catalunya Strategic Plan 2019-2022

AQU Catalunya website [AQU site principal](#)

Catalan Higher Education Qualifications Framework

Code of Ethics AQU Catalunya

Conditions for the Recognition by AQU Catalunya of Joint Programmes Accreditations Using the European Approach Framework

Ex Ante Accreditation of Short Learning Programmes

Framework for the Validation, Monitoring, Modification and Accreditation of Recognised University Degrees (MVSMA)

General Framework for Incorporating the Gender Perspective in Higher Education Teaching

Guide to Ex-Ante Accreditation of Joint Programmes Using the European Approach

Guide to the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres

Internal Rules of Procedure of AQU Catalunya's Governing Board and the Board's Standing Commission

Minutes of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya N.12 (8.-15.4.2021)

Minutes of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya N.11 (1.-9.7.2020)

Minutes of the Standing Committee of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya N.7 (19.-26.11.2021)

Note by AQU about the Governing Board 25.2.2022

Note by AQU on Good practices in teaching and learning employability skills 24.2.2022

Organisation of External Visits. Blended Model 2022

Profiles and Requirements for Taking Part in Teaching Staff, Institutional and Appeal Assessment Processes

Standards and Criteria for the Institutional Accreditation of University Centre

Selection of reports provided by AQU: <https://cloud.aqu.cat/s/TMF5a4BjcxAwZw>:

- 2 site visit accreditation reports (one excellent and another with conditions)

- 2 site visit reports of accreditation with the World Federation for Medical Education standards
- 2 site visit reports of certification of IQAS (automatic translation from Spanish)
- 3 validations reports (2 unfavourable and 1 favourable) (automatic translation from Spanish)
- 2 validations reports of Short Learning Programmes (automatic translation from Spanish) available at <https://www.aqu.cat/en/universities/Programmes-Assessment/Short-learning-programmes-Micro-credentials-Assessment-2020>
- 2 reports following the European Approach (in English) available at <https://www.aqu.cat/en/universities/Programmes-Assessment/European-Approach>

Student Report of accreditation of the degree in innovation and food safety, 19.1.2020

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

AQU Catalunya external review report 2017

AQU Catalunya's 2019 follow-up report

AQU Catalunya Review 2022 Terms of Reference

AUDIT PROGRAMME Guide to the design of internal quality assurance systems in higher education

Catalan Talent Observatory [Catalan Talent Observatory \(aqu.cat\)](http://aqu.cat)

ENQA Board's decision on AQU Catalunya's review, including comments concerning areas for development

ENQA Board's letter in addition to the Membership decision of 21 June 2017

ENQA Board's letter regarding AQU Catalunya's 2019 follow-up report

ESG European Standards and Guidelines for the external Quality Assurance of Higher Education

[Procedure for rulings in cases of appeal and the issue of review reports on judgments entered by review, certification and accreditation panels and committees](#)

Royal Decree 640/2021, of 27 July, on the creation, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, and institutional accreditation of university centres. [BOE.es - BOE-A-2021-12613](https://www.boe.es/boe/A-2021-12613)
[Royal Decree 640/2021, of July 27, on the creation, recognition and authorization of universities and university centers, and institutional accreditation of university centers.](#)

[Rules of internal procedure of AQU Catalunya's Appeals Committee](#)

Selection of reports available at [Home | EUC | AOU](#)

Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies

ANNEX 5. MAPPING OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN AQU CRITERIA AND THE ESGS AS PRESENTED IN AQU SAR

PROGRAMME REVIEW

ESG		ESG Validation / Modification	Monitoring	Accreditation	Short learning programmes - Micro credentials	European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
I.1	Policy for quality assurance	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	8. Internal quality assurance system	I. Quality assurance system
I.2	Design and approval of programmes	1. Description of the title 2. Justification 3. Competences 5. Programme's planning 8. Expected Results	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	5. Planning	B. Justification C. Knowledge, skills, and competences I. Quality assurance system
I.3	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3. Competencies 5. Programme's planning	3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes	3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes	3. Aim and learning outcomes 5. Planning	E. Study programme (curriculum) I. Quality assurance system
I.4	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4. Student access and admissions		3.1. Quality of the training programme 3.6. Quality of programme (learning) outcomes	4. Student access, admissions and student support	D. Student access and admission I. Quality assurance system

I.5	Teaching staff	6. Teaching and support staff	3.4. Suitability of teaching staff for the training programme	3.4. Suitability of teaching staff for the training programme	6. Teaching and support staff	F. Academic staff G. Material resources and services I. Quality assurance system
I.6	Learning resources and student support	7. Material resources and services	3.5. Effectiveness of learning support systems	3.5. Effectiveness of learning support systems	4. Student access, admissions and student support 7. Material resources and services	G. Material resources and services I. Quality assurance system
I.7	Information management	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information	3.2. Relevance of the public information	8. Internal quality assurance System	I. Quality assurance system
I.8	Public information	9. Internal quality assurance system	3.2. Relevance of the public information	3.2. Relevance of the public information	8. Internal quality assurance System	H. Expected outcomes I. Quality assurance system
I.9	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	9. Internal quality assurance system	Procedure	3.3. Efficacy of the programme's internal quality assurance system	8. Internal quality assurance System	I. Quality assurance system
I.10	Cyclical external quality assurance	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

ESG		Ex-post IQAs certification	Institutional accreditation	Teaching assessment handbooks ¹
I.1	Policy for quality assurance	1. IQAS review and improvement 6. Public information and accountability	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process
I.2	Design and approval of programmes	2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes	Not applicable	Not applicable
I.3	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes 3. Teaching-learning and support for students	Not applicable	Not applicable
I.4	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	3. Teaching-learning and support for students	Not applicable	Not applicable
I.5	Teaching staff	4. Academic staff	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it D. Rating the application of criteria and the teaching evaluation process
I.6	Learning resources and student support	3. Teaching-learning and support for students 5. Physical resources and services	Not applicable	Not applicable

I.7	Information management	1. IQAS review and improvement 6. Public information and accountability	B. Results data and its assessment of the entire pre accreditation period E. Rating agent's satisfaction and their results	B. Results data and its assessment of the entire pre accreditation period E. Rating agent's satisfaction and their results
I.8	Public information	6. Public information and accountability	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it	C. Rating of mechanisms to ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and ensure the dissemination of it
I.9	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1. IQAS review and improvement 2. Design, review and improvement of study programmes 3. Teaching-learning and support for students	2. Design, approval and roll-out of training programmes 7. Implementation of the IQAS and academic results	Not applicable
I.10	Cyclical external quality assurance	Procedure	Procedure	Procedure

¹ The scope of this activity is limited in its nature, nevertheless it has been accepted in the ToR due to the fact that AQU covers the remaining standards in its other reviews for the institutions in question.

INTERNATIONAL

ESG		International quality assurance	Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
I.1	Policy for quality assurance	3.1.9. Governance	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system
I.2	Design and approval of programmes	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system

1.3	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards 3.1.6. The institution's relations with the wider community and society in general 3.1.7. The institution's relations with other institutions for academic exchange	3.1.2. Management of the training program in Catalonia
1.4	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	3.1.1. Quality of programmes and awards 3.1.4. Learning assessment	3.1.2. Management of the training program in Catalonia
1.5	Teaching staff	3.1.2. Teaching staff 3.1.8. Research	3.1.3. Resources
1.6	Learning resources and student support	3.1.3. Learning resources	3.1.3. Resources
1.7	Information management	3.1.5. Information	3.1.4. Internal quality assurance system
1.8	Public information	3.1.5. Information 3.1.9. Governance	3.1.1. Public information
1.9	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Procedure	Procedure
1.10	Cyclical external quality assurance	Procedure	Procedure

ENQA TARGETED REVIEW 2022

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Targeted Review of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya), undertaken in 2022.

enqa.

European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education