AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE GALICIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM (ACSUG) PROGRESS REPORT

Santiago de Compostela, 16 September 2016

1) INTRODUCTION

ACSUG, a full member of ENQA since 2009, underwent another external review process in 2014, after completing 5 years as a member of the body, resulting in the renewal of its full membership for a further 5 years, until 2019. In the letter sent to ACSUG by the ENQA Board on 26/09/2014, it was stated that two years after the review, ACSUG must forward a report with an overview of the actions carried out in relation to the recommendations made by the panel of experts in the final review report.

In addition to the above points, we also include in this report a few general comments about ACSUG's participation in international activities since the date of the renewal of its full membership in 2014.

2) GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

ENQA

Since its full membership of ENQA was renewed in 2014, ACSUG has continued to play an active role in ENQA related activities:

a) Participation in working groups: technical officers from ACSUG have been involved in two working groups set up by ENQA in 2012: one on the impact of quality assurance and the other on the participation of stakeholders in the QA procedures.

b) Collaboration in studies and projects undertaken by ENQA or by member agencies: a study of institutional accreditation practices (requested by the Swiss Agency AAQ), 4th Quality Procedures Project (QPP), Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education project (QACHE).

c) Participation in several ENQA newsletters, with news about relevant ACSUG activities.

d) Attendance at and participation in all ENQA General Assemblies, Members' Forum and in all European Quality Assurance Forums (EQAF).

e) An ACSUG technical officer took part in one of the expert training seminars organized by ENQA in Oslo in November 2014, and was subsequently added to the list of expert assessors available to form part of the panels undertaking the external reviews of member agencies.

EQAR

Immediately following the external review process by ENQA, ACSUG requested the renewal of its registration on EQAR, which was subsequently renewed until 2019. The final external review report issued following the assessment by ENQA was the main criteria on which EQAR based its decision on whether ACSUG operates in accordance with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the

European Higher Education Area (ESG)" and accept ACSUG's renewal for another five-year term.

In 2014, ACSUG took part in the EQAR project on Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area (RIQAA).

ECA

Since June 2013, ACSUG has also been a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and takes an active role in the organisation's activities and annual meetings. A technical officer from ACSUG is a member of one of the Working Groups on the Mutual Recognition and Joint Programmes.

ACSUG organised the ECA 2016 Annual Meeting in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, at which an ACSUG technical officer was selected to become a member of the organisation's Board.

OTHERS

a) In 2015, ACSUG became actively involved in the TEMPUS IV Project: "Modernization and Development of Curricula on Pedagogy and Educational Management in the Central Asian Countries (EDUCA)" coordinated by the Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg (OvGU).

b) During 2014 and 2015 it conducted an external evaluation of 9 qualifications at the Andina Néstor Cáceres Velásques University (UANCV) in Juliaca (Peru), pursuant to the collaboration agreements signed for this purpose.

c) During 2014 and 2015, ACSUG conducted the external evaluation of the Institute of Government and Public Administration at San Martín de Porres University (USMP) in Lima (Peru), and the monitoring process of 5 faculties which had already been evaluated successfully by ACSUG in 2012. Towards the end of 2015, the ACSUG Director travelled to Peru to participate as a speaker in the "9th International Seminar Workshop: Challenges and achievements of quality education and international best practices", organised by the USMP.

d) A partnership agreement was signed with Anáhuac Xalapa University in Mexico whereby 4 qualifications in the branch of economics will be evaluated during the second half of 2016.

e) The ACSUG Director attended the "First Preparatory Seminar of the Third Academic Summit", held in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, at the invitation of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, to give a speech on "Higher Education Accreditation in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union". During his trip he also met representatives from the country's universities, who expressed their interest in working with ACSUG for international evaluation and accreditation activities.

3) COMMENTS ON THE AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTED IN THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF ACSUG BY THE ENQA PANEL OF ASSESSORS IN THEIR FINAL REPORT

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 1: Consider how it might initiate a conversation with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, in order to explore whether and how to devolve more of the operational aspects of responsibilities for quality assurance to the Universities, including the Galician Universities, thereby effecting economies in its own activities and enhancing the autonomy of the Universities.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 6: Reflect carefully on the concerns expressed about the FIDES-AUDIT process in the 2009 Report and this report and seek to initiate a conversation with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA in order to consider jointly whether, in the interests of supporting the academic autonomy of the Universities, including the Galician Universities, greater responsibility for the development of internal quality assurance systems should be devolved to the Universities while the Agency retains responsibility for the quality assurance of the University's internal quality arrangements

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT 1 AND 6

The explanation offered on these two areas of development highlighted in the final review report is a joint one given the clear relationship between them.

The greatest concern in this respect is generated by the FIDES-AUDIT Programme, since the external panel views this activity as interference by ACSUG in the autonomy of the universities and in the universities' development of the introduction of their quality assurance systems.

This concern of the external assessors was discussed by the ACSUG Director in the subsequent meetings of the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU), the body to which all Spanish agencies belong. The issue was debated, especially by ACSUG and the other three agencies who jointly developed the programme: the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (ANECA), The Agency for Quality in the Catalan University System (AQU Catalunya) and the Agency for Quality in the Basque University System (UNIBASQ), all of which are full members of ENQA and none of which have received similar comments in their external review processes.

The conclusion of the debate affirms, as indicated by ACSUG in the previous external reviews conducted by ENQA in 2009 and 2014, that the purpose of the FIDES-AUDIT Programme is to support the university institutions in their efforts to integrate all quality assurance activities in relation to teaching and to ensure that the universities have access to all the latest and most relevant information so that they may use this in their verification, monitoring and qualification renewal processes.

ACSUG wishes to stress that the implementation and maintenance of the quality assurance systems is the responsibility of the Galician universities themselves and that the agency merely ensures that the implementation is carried out correctly and in accordance with the specifications and requirements of the systems that they themselves developed.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 2*: As part of its move to adopt a more strategic approach to planning its activities consider how, when setting the aims and objectives for new external quality assurance processes it could undertake consultations specifically linked to such proposals more widely across the Galician Universities and stakeholders before asking its Board of Directors to approve them.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 2

With regard to this point, we wish to highlight that the ACSUG 2016-2020 Strategic Plan has given special priority to planning activities and to the subsequent meta-evaluation of the activities undertaken by ACSUG.

As such, and specifically in relation to the assessment of qualifications and institutions, in July 2014 and in July 2015, ACSUG held meetings with university representatives to examine the previous evaluation processes and to plan future ones.

In July 2016, a meeting was held once more with university representatives, and another separate meeting was held with a significant number of representatives of the assessors who work with ACSUG. At these meetings we analysed all aspects of the 2015/2016 qualifications and institutions evaluation processes, including the results of the satisfaction surveys on the evaluation process completed by all the stakeholder groups. The primary aim of this procedure, which is to be undertaken periodically, is to have a bearing on the meta-evaluation of the activities undertaken by ACSUG, in order to introduce improvements and changes to the forthcoming evaluation processes.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 3*: Explore with its stakeholders whether they would welcome proposals for the external review of Universities as whole academic communities and corporate entities responsible for the quality of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards to which they lead.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 3

In relation to this section, we wish to bring attention to the publication of a law in Spain in June 2015, laying the foundations for the future institutional accreditation of the universities in Spain, which has not yet existed in Spain, as accreditation was only conducted at the award level. This matter is currently being discussed by the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU) in order to gradually introduce this method of evaluation.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 4: *Continue to seek ways in which reviewers from outside Spain and other international experts can contribute to the Agency's reviews and its work more generally.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 4

With regard to this issue, we have continued to expand the ACSUG database of international reviewers, registering new details of reviewers interested in working with ACSUG. Some of the reviewers from outside Spain already participating with ACSUG include a Portuguese assessor for the evaluation of awards and another one from Italy, which can be consulted in the list of assessors published on the ACSUG website. In addition, we are promoting the international character of the selected Spanish reviewers in order to provide a broader view of the evaluation processes.

International representatives are also present on the ACSUG Advisory Council, offering the perspectives of other countries in the examination of ACSUG activity and in the proposals for improvements to it.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 5: *Consider, if appropriate in association with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, how it might ensure the inclusion of an element of retrospective critical self-evaluation in submissions for each of the external review processes it operates, in order to encourage the exercise of critical self-reflection on the part of the subjects of its reviews.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 5

All the periodical evaluation processes of Spanish university qualifications include a self-evaluation which the universities must complete and reflect in the subsequent reports:

- **Ex-ante evaluation (verification) of degrees:** During this stage of the review process, the universities must present a programme for the award prior to its implementation, including an internal assessment of the need for the qualification, student numbers forecast, resources, etc.
- **Monitoring of degrees**: Those responsible for each award must monitor its progress each year and communicate their findings in a monitoring report.
- **Ex-post evaluation (accreditation) of degrees**: Finally, in order for an award to gain accreditation, all the information available about the degree over 4 years is analysed (for masters) or 6 years (for degrees and doctorates) and a summary report is issued, which is studied by ACSUG.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 7: *Check periodically the information needs of students, sponsors employers and Universities as users of its reports, and how its reports can better meet their needs*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 7

ACSUG is making a special effort to [measure the satisfaction](#) of users of the review processes, and one of the aspects we ask about in this process is the clarity and transparency of the assessment procedures and the results.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 8: *Set out a five year strategic plan and forecast budgets for presentation to its Board of Directors in order to plan its capacity to deliver its growing programme of external reviews.*

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 9: *update its Mission Statement to take account of the Guidelines that accompany ENQA Criterion 4/ESG 3.5 and publish the updated Mission Statement, setting out the division of labour and responsibilities between itself and the Universities and explaining how its Mission is translated into a clear policy and management plan via its Strategic Plan.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT 8 AND 9

Aware of the need to establish a long-term Strategic Plan, underlined by ENQA in its 2014 external review, ACSUG has set to work on this task. The plan was designed over several phases, resulting in the approval of the first ACSUG Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 at the Board of Directors meeting on 12/07/2016, which [was later published on its website](#).

The strategic plans already established by other Spanish university quality agencies were taken into account during its design and development stage. During the initial stages, undertaken in coordination with personnel outside the ACSUG, the plan was developed by agency staff, who performed a number of SWOT analyses in order to identify the most important aspects to include in the Plan. At a later stage, members of the ACSUG Advisory Council and the CGIACA were also involved as were representatives of reviewers of the various review processes carried out by ACSUG.

Based on all this information, various drafts of the Strategic Plan were prepared, it was later presented to the Board of Directors for their examination and review and the process concluded with its final approval at the meeting held at ACSUG on 12/07/2016.

The next step will require the drafting of Implementation Plans covering the lifetime of the Strategic Plan and all the actions needed to carry out the plan in order of priority or importance.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 10: *consider as it moves to have its new Statutes enacted whether one of the membership positions for the CGIACA should be reserved for a suitably qualified person from outside Galicia.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 10

With regards to this point, a text with the ACSUG's new statutes exists, approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting on 23/07/2014. The new statutes establish a new composition of the CGIACA, on which, out of the eight members to be appointed, a representative from the business sector and another from among the

students must be included. The rest of the members include representatives from the academic and scientific community who may be selected from other regions of Spain or from abroad.

The new statutes are under review by the regional Government, and once they have completed all the necessary procedures and have been approved and published, the new members of the CGIACA will be appointed and its operational guidelines will be approved.

AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 11*: set out clear statements protocols and procedures for the conduct of appeals against the findings of its reviews and evaluations and publish them on its web site.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 11

We wish to bring your attention to the comments included in the report submitted by ACSUG on 14/07/2014 in response to the draft final report on the ENQA review process.

At ACSUG, there are two distinct areas of activity:

- OWN PROCEDURES, these are those in which the entire process, from the invitation through to the final resolution, falls within the responsibility of ACSUG (teaching staff accreditation, regional salary bonuses, etc.)
In these cases the applicants are fully informed of the possibility of lodging an appeal against the resolution of the CGIACA (independent body with powers to make resolutions):

1. On our website, where all the information about each of the procedures for all the different processes can be found (example of teaching staff accreditation).
2. Over the various invitations, published in the Official Journal of Galicia and on the ACSUG website (example of invitation to teaching staff accreditation, where this information is available in Clause 12, page 8).
3. On the computer application, the tool for completing the application, where the applicants have a direct link to the appeals form.
4. Finally, in the resolution itself, of which each applicant is notified individually, it is explicitly indicated that they may lodge an appeal against the resolution.

- SHARED PROCEDURES are those in which ACSUG participates in a stage of the procedure, which is eventually resolved by another body (for example officially recognised qualifications evaluations).

In these cases all the procedures are also published on our website in the corresponding protocols (for example qualification accreditations) where all the stages of the process are explained, including the claims and appeals stage.

The CGIACA prepares a provisional report, which is sent to the applicant centres, offering them the possibility to submit an appeal. These appeals are studied before issuing the final report. This final report is forwarded to the competent organisation so that it can issue the final resolution. It is this body that notifies the applicants of the resolution and explicitly offers them the opportunity to lodge an appeal.

__AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 12:__ *Provide clear statements and protocols, procedures and guidance for its Advisory Council to enable it to fulfil its roles.*

EXPLANATION BY ACSUG ABOUT THE AREA OF DEVELOPMENT 12

In relation to this point a text with the new ACSUG statutes exists, which specifies that operational rules must be approved for the Advisory Council. These rules stress the importance of the participation by all its members, setting out the specific activities to be carried out by the body and includes an internal rule with regard to substitutions when any of its members are frequently absent from the meetings.

The new statutes are under review by the regional Government, and once they have completed all the necessary procedures and have been approved and published, the Advisory Council's Operational Rules will be approved pursuant to the provisions of the statutes.

3) CONCLUSIONS

ACSUG believes the design, drafting, approval, publication and implementation of its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan to be an important step subsequent to 2014 external review.

The Plan's objectives include the areas for development discussed in the external review final report, as well as other issues identified internally within ACSUG.

The timescale of the Strategic Plan (2016-2020), which coincides largely with the renewal term of our full membership of ENQA (2014-2019), provides a strong foundation on which we can continue to drive towards our continuous improvement and to comply with the European Quality Standards and Guidelines (ESG).