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Dublin, 26 September 2014

Subject: Full membership of The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Research in Andalusia (AAC-DEVA) in ENQA

Dear Juan Antonio Devesa Alcaraz,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 15 September 2014, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm AAC-DEVA Full membership of ENQA for five years from that date.

Though the ENQA Board concluded that AAC-DEVA is in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, the Board would like to receive a follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report (as outlined in the annex attached) within two years of its decision, i.e. by September 2016.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Please accept my congratulations for the re-confirmation of Full Membership of AAC-DEVA.

Yours sincerely,



Padraig Walsh
President of ENQA

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, the agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, in the following issues:

AAC-DEVA should make sure that the programme accreditation process and specifically, the new accreditation stage are able to **foster real enhancement** and contribute to the goals set for the Andalusian region: employability and enhanced institutional accountability.

Regarding the number of site visits, AAC-DEVA is recommended to foresee the planning is **feasible in terms of delays and resources**. Universities will be visited several times per year (i.e. University of Seville will receive between 42 and 55 visits in the period 2014-2017) which will impose a heavy burden on the HEIs. An additional challenge associated to this scheme is avoid losing the **global view of a given institution** and to ensure consistency along the different site visits. AAC-DEVA should carefully consider these issues.

AAC-DEVA is encouraged to reflect on the way the **selection of experts** is done and the registers of AAC-DEVA's expert data base are updated so as to capitalise on its full potential.

It is recommended that the process of **selection of student experts** is revised. The fact that the student expert selection procedure is completely open could lead to some problems (i.e. students could be pointed out in advanced and be encouraged to apply, which would pervert the selection process). Additionally, the Council of Students could provide some support to the agency in order to improve the selection and training of student experts.

AAC-DEVA's Technical Commission is not yet fully functional and AAC-DEVA is therefore encouraged to remain vigilant and **ensure that the student representative is really treated as an equal**.

Regarding the **use of international experts**, additional efforts should be invested to this regard, as introducing international expertise brings in important benefits in terms of introduction of an international perspective, exchange of practices and avoidance of conflict of interest.

As the whole accreditation cycle is not yet implemented, it is not clear whether a **follow-up after the first accreditation phase** is intended. Introducing such a follow-up phase would be consistent with the spirit of the ESG. AAC-DEVA is recommended to consider this issue in consultation with the rest of Spanish agencies and the National and Regional Governments.

More work could be done in order to increase AAC-DEVA's contribution to system-wide analysis. In particular, the AAC-DEVA is recommended to prepare a publication devoted to the current state and trends of the quality assurance system in Andalusia which will enable AAC-DEVA to profit from the rich and abundant information gathered after the first verification and follow-up rounds. In consistency with the results of the 2009 AAC-DEVA review, further opportunities for cross-regional studies in collaboration with other Spanish quality assurance agencies could be explored.

AAC-DEVA should operate its **Internal Quality Assurance system** in a more formal and documented way in order to ensure that continuous improvement is actually implemented. The results of the different satisfaction surveys should be formally considered. The impact of the improvement initiatives adopted should be assessed in order to ensure that continuous improvement is actually taking place. Lean quality approaches are taking place, however, some written records should be found on this improvement process, based on an annual SWOT assessment of the agency's practice. Additionally, AAC-DEVA is recommended to introduce formal feedback mechanisms addressed to the staff of the Agency.

Concerning the international activities of AAC-DEVA, it is recommended that an **international strategy** is clearly defined which is consistent with AAC-DEVA's mission and available resources. In view of the considerable resources that are allotted annually to programme accreditation and various other evaluation schemes, it can be considered somewhat disappointing that AGAE/DEVA has not yet, after many years of agency activity, been able to complete a full-wheel cyclic review, including site visits, of the Andalusian HE sector. With 11 universities making up the sector, some kind of institutional approach would certainly have made this possible, if only at the expense of some of the voluntary schemes that are currently in operation. As it now is, the external quality assurance regime presents itself as rather fragmented. It is understandable that the agency follows the regulations and plans that are set at the national or inter-agency level, but it is still recommended use its influence to make the system more coherent and holistic in its totality, and less detail-oriented.