
ENQA AGENCY REVIEW:
CATALAN UNIVERSITY QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY
(AQU CATALUNYA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AQU Catalunya is a quality assurance agency with a long tradition. It is one of the first agencies to go through a third ENQA peer review. Thanks to the experience of the previous reviews and the active participation of AQU Catalunya in the debates on the new 2015 *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), the agency was well prepared for this review. It clearly has the necessary structures in place to comply with the ESG. On the one hand, this made the work of the review panel easy. On the other hand, this context made it challenging for the review panel to add value through this process and provide relevant developmental feedback.

The main focus of the panel was the agency's compliance with the 2015 ESG. AQU has significant experience in the implementation of quality assurance processes as defined in Part 2 of the ESG and taking into account Part 1. The agency fully complies with ESG 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 3.2, 3.6 and 3.7 and substantially complies with ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5. The panel has formulated some suggestions in the report in order to further optimise the current approaches, and to fully integrate the vision behind the revised ESG. AQU Catalunya benefits from having a clear legal basis and looks forward to longer term funding by the Government, based on a new 4-year negotiated contract instead of the current annual contract. This will hopefully strengthen the autonomy of the agency. Internal quality assurance processes are in place and are ISO-certified. The new Catalan legislation has clearly contributed towards enhancing the independence of the agency with regard to the governance aspect and has allowed the agency to create a clear appeals procedure. Nevertheless, further improvement is possible in this area including the independence and objectivity of the AQU decision making governance structures. Finally, thematic analyses, in the understanding of the 2015 ESG, and thus focused on sharing the results of own quality assurance processes, have received more attention recently. The agency has published some reports where it analyses not only the results of its quality assurance processes, but combines those results also with surveys of alumni and employers. These reports are welcomed by AQU's stakeholders and may have a strong impact on higher education and the broader society.

In order to also provide some developmental feedback, as part of making recommendations for the various ESG, the panel focussed on three main areas in which AQU Catalunya has clear ambitions for the future:

- A shift from more compliance based procedures to a system which focusses more on internal accountability and the governance of higher education institutions. Within such a system roles and responsibilities should be clearly understood by all internal and external stakeholders.
- A related shift from piecemeal evaluation to a more integrated approach to external quality assurance, namely by focussing on the institutional level.
- The development of the international activities in all their dimensions.

AQU Catalunya has an ambition to move towards a less burdensome and more effective system of quality assurance within which institutions take more responsibility for their own quality. Such a shift requires a strong and accountable governance within each higher education institution. This should allow institutions to take responsibility for the quality of their education based on a well-developed internal quality assurance system. Such a shift includes a partial transfer of the responsibility for quality assurance from quality assurance agencies to higher education institutions. AQU Catalunya may benefit from developing a clear vision on this redistribution of roles between the agency and higher education institutions.

In order to reduce the burden of external quality assurance, many systems replace procedures at the level of individual staff and programmes by enhancement led institutional level evaluations. AQU Catalunya has the same ambition. While the Spanish legislation allows for a first step in this direction, the panel is convinced that this is only a partial step towards an approach which is commonly understood as institutional accreditation in an international context (evaluation at the level of the whole university). The agency might benefit from developing a specific vision on the design of a fully-fledged system of institutional accreditation which would be fit for purpose for the Catalan, and potentially the Spanish, context.

AQU Catalunya has always been very active on the European and international level, with an active role in international networks and projects. The agency has an ambition to further contribute to international quality assurance debates, to contribute to the internationalisation of the Catalan higher education system and to pursue an increase of its involvement in international quality assurance processes. The panel fully supports the international ambition of the agency. Based on its discussions with all stakeholders, the panel concluded that there is no consolidated understanding yet on AQU Catalunya's role and priorities in relation to internationalisation. Resources (both staff time and money) are needed to come to a common understanding of the priorities for the agency and to implement this strategy.

Overall, the panel concludes that there is a high degree of compliance between the work of the agency and the 2015 ESG. AQU clearly has the potential to further develop its role in Catalonia, Spain and Europe in the coming years.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of AQU Catalunya (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 November 2016 to April 2017.

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 carry out their work as an agency in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is AQU Catalunya's third review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2012 REVIEW

The panel found that the agency generally complies with the ESG. The agency fully complied with ESG 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5; and substantially complied with ESG 3.1 and 3.6 (see Annex 1). However, some points of attention were mentioned:

- ESG Part 1 was embedded in AQU Catalunya's processes, however, some parts were not as fully addressed as others.
- The participation of international experts in site visits.
- No reports had been published on negative (initial) validation procedures.
- The readability of the reports could be improved for students and potential students.
- The staffing demands had to be planned carefully in order to cope with the expected rise in workload.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2017 ENQA-review of AQU Catalunya was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of AQU Catalunya was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Pedro Nuno Teixeira (Chair – EUA/ENQA nominee), Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at University of Porto (U. Porto), Director of Centre for Research on Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal;
- Pieter-Jan Van de Velde (Secretary – ENQA nominee), independent quality assurance consultant, former staff member of VLIR/VLUHR Quality Assurance, Belgium;
- Karena Maguire (ENQA nominee), Head of System Quality Projects & Enhancement (Projects), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland;
- Adrian Tudor Stan (ESU nominee), PhD student (Dentistry) at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" in Timisoara, Romania.

AQU Catalunya produced a self-assessment report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to draw its conclusions. The panel conducted a site visit to validate fully the self-assessment and clarify any points at issue. Finally, the review panel produced this final report based on the self-assessment report, site visit, and its findings. In doing so, it provided an opportunity for AQU Catalunya to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review. As not all documentation presented to the panel was available in English and some was available only in Catalan, not all panel member could fully analyse all documents provided. The panel as a whole was, nevertheless, able to consult all necessary information.

Self-assessment report

The self-assessment report is the result of a process which was initiated in March 2016. The first two stages of the process involved the planning and drawing up of the draft and were completed internally. The project and the content of the report was defined by the director of AQU Catalunya together with the agency's Internal Coordinating Committee, and a draft was drawn up on the basis of an analysis of the evidence and an evaluation of the progress made since the previous review. Towards the end of the process (October 2016) a self-evaluation committee comprised of representatives of the Catalan university system and staff and board members of AQU Catalunya. The terms of reference for the committee were to review and revise the self-assessment report and to make any relevant contributions. This committee assessed also the contributions received as a result of the external consultation and was responsible for drawing up the final self-assessment report.

The self-assessment report was comprehensive, accurate, and informative and served as a valuable source of information to the panel. The electronic links to policies, procedures and guidelines on the website were very useful. Nevertheless, a more self-critical approach might have been useful, especially as regards the degree of progress of AQU regarding the areas for improvement noted at the last review.

Site visit

The Review panel spent three days in Barcelona, arriving on the 5th of February and departing on the 8th of February 2017. During those days, the panel had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of stakeholders on the premises of AQU Catalunya. AQU Catalunya drew up the initial draft programme for the site visit and the final version was defined in close cooperation with the chair and secretary of the panel and the ENQA review coordinator. The visit was well planned and organized. The programme included interview sessions with members of the Governing Board, representatives of the regional Government, the director of AQU Catalunya and a number of staff members, representatives of the agency's Appeal Committee, members of various committees, and members of the review panels. The panel also met various stakeholders, including representatives of the higher education institutions located in the region, student representatives, and external stakeholders. An overview of the meetings is available in Annex 2.

The staff of the agency demonstrated high professionalism during the entire review process and provided excellent assistance to the panel regarding all matters. At the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting where it agreed on the preliminary conclusions relating to the level of compliance of AQU Catalunya on each of the standards in part 2 and 3 of the ESG. The secretary of the panel then drafted the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel. The draft report was submitted to AQU Catalunya for factual verification in April 2017 and with reference to ENQA standards AQU Catalunya was given two weeks to comment on the report.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Legal framework

In Spain, the origin of the Higher Education legal framework is the Constitution of 1978. The State lays down the basic national regulations governing the implementation in article 27 (university autonomy). Each Autonomous Community is responsible for its own higher education policy. The Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) of 21st December 2001, amended by Organic Law 4/2007 (LOMLOU) of 12th April 2007, defined the basic regulations on a national scale and established the powers and competencies of universities, the national Government, and the Governments of the different Autonomous Communities. The Spanish higher education system underwent significant changes in its adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In the new system, aligned with the EHEA, Spanish universities offer the same three cycles as in other countries: Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. The study programmes offered by the Catalan University System cover all academic fields, all levels, and all types of programmes.

While the Spanish legislation creates a general framework, Catalonia has the competency to further specify several aspects of the legislation. These competencies are enacted through the Catalan Act 1/2003 (LUC) of 19th February, on the universities in Catalonia. This defines the university system of Catalonia as consisting of the universities established in Catalonia and details the objectives and applicable principles; it also covers higher education activities, which consist of teaching and research; it defines the university community as comprising the student body, teaching and research staff, and administrative and services staff; it refers to governance and representation in the public universities and the legal framework of universities and the organisation and academic governance of university studies and structures; it addresses quality assurance in higher education and the universities and regulates certain aspects of the economic and financial system of the public universities.

Institutions

The higher education system in Catalonia consists of twelve universities, seven of which are public and five private. Four of the public universities have their campuses in Barcelona and the city's metropolitan area: University of Barcelona (UB, 1450), Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB, 1968), Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC, 1971) and the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF, 1991). The other three public universities have their area of influence in the three other provincial capitals in Catalonia: the University of Girona (UdG, 1991), the University of Lleida (UdL, 1991) and, in Tarragona, the Rovira i Virgili University (URV, 1991).

The other universities are the Ramon Llull University (URL, 1991), the Open University of Catalonia (UOC, 1995), which offers distance learning courses, the International University of Catalonia (UIC, 1997) and the Abat Oliba University (UAO, 2003), all four of which are located in Barcelona province and the University of Vic/Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC, 1997).

In the 2015-2016 academic year there were 241,270 students enrolled in Catalan universities, with 73% in public institutions and 20,378 teachers. Provision totalled 1,298 programmes: 488 Bachelor's, 570 Master's and 240 doctoral programmes.

Table 1: Size of the universities in the Catalan University System

University	No. students	Teaching staff ¹	Under-graduate programmes	Master's programmes	PhD programmes
UB	50,642	5,532	71	145	48
UAB	37,686	4,236	82	99	63
UPC	29,067	2,712	59	58	50
UPF	18,489	1,270	37	55	9
UdG	15,109	1,358	49	28	10
UdL	9,670	1,040	33	33	9
URV	13,775	1,723	47	38	27
UOC	41,120	246	20	29	3
URL	14,096	939	36	52	10
UVic-UCC	6,197	571	30	11	4
UIC	3,636	527	13	12	4
UAO	1,783	224	11	10	3
Total	241,270	20,378	488	570	240

Source: UNEIX information system for the data on the number of students and teaching staff, and the Official Register of Catalonia for the number of degree programmes.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

In line with the division of powers in the Spanish legal framework, the functions of evaluation, certification and accreditation are reserved functions of the National Agency for Quality Assurance (ANECA) and the evaluation bodies determined by each Autonomous Community's laws. In Autonomous Communities where such an evaluation body has been established and this body is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), it has the competency to implement the full range of quality assurance activities which are assigned to quality assurance agencies in higher education.

With regard to programme review, the Spanish Government has laid down that degrees and higher education qualifications must follow a system of validation (ex-ante accreditation), modification, monitoring and accreditation. In 2015, the Spanish Government has added the possibility for university centres (Faculties, Schools) to obtain institutional accreditation based on the ex-post accreditation of at least half of their official bachelor and master programmes in combination with the accreditation of their internal quality assurance system.

¹ Data updated to the 2014-2015 academic year.

AQU CATALUNYA

AQU Catalunya is a public organisation that was founded in 1996 with the mission to conduct external reviews and analyse quality in the universities to safeguard the public interest, as well as to encourage enhancement in the sector and to inform society of the results of external review processes. While its main activities focus on Catalonia, the agency is also active at international level.

The origins of AQU Catalunya lie in a legacy consortium referred to as the Agency for the Quality of the University System in Catalonia, which was established on 29 October 1996. In 2003, the consortium became the present-day agency, until on 8 July 2015 when the Parliament of Catalonia approved the AQU Catalunya Act (Act 15/2015) of the 21th of July in order to allow AQU Catalunya to comply better with the ESG.

AQU CATALUNYA'S STRUCTURE

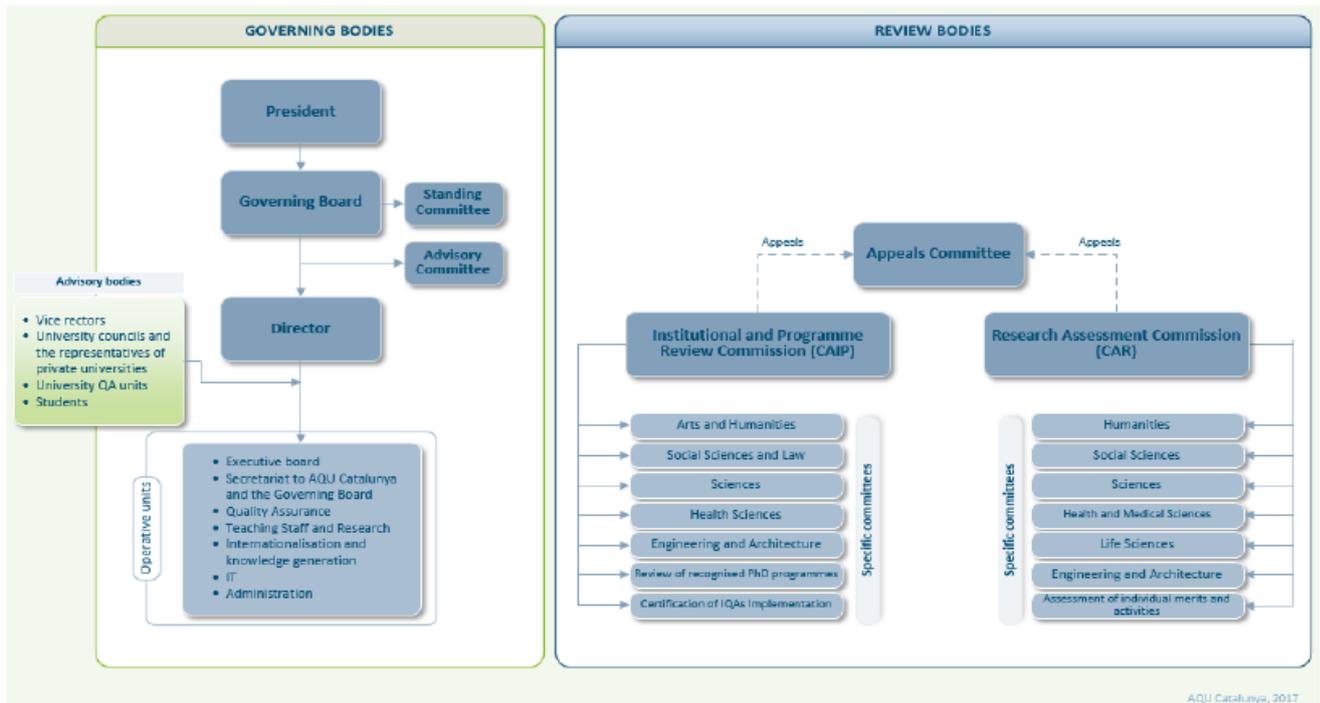
The agency is an independent body, and it is funded by the government of Catalonia.

The Governing Board is the main body that oversees the running of AQU Catalunya. The Board comprises of the chairperson who is appointed by the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia and the director of the agency; the rectors of the public and private universities; the chairpersons of the public universities' social councils; three academics chosen by the Inter-university Council of Catalonia; two people from the corresponding government department with jurisdiction over the universities and higher education; the chairperson of the Research Assessment Commission (CAR); and two students and two representatives of labour organisations. The Governing Board meets twice a year. The Board may appoint a smaller Standing Committee and delegate powers to it.

The implementation of quality assurance procedures is the responsibility of two committees: the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and the Research Assessment Commission (CAR).

The work of the CAIP is to ensure that the QA instruments and procedures used by AQU Catalunya in its review activities are correctly applied. Its work is divided into two main areas, programme review and institutional review. The CAIP is appointed by the Governing Board. It is composed of Catalan and foreign academics, quality assurance professionals and students. When exercising its functions, the CAIP works through a series of subject and function-specific committees.

Figure 1: The structure of AQU Catalunya



The CAR is responsible for the quality assurance of teaching and teaching staff. More specifically, it issues the necessary reports and accreditation for research and advanced research prior to selection for the recruitment of academic staff; and it assesses the individual merit (in teaching, research and management) of public service and contract teaching and research staff in public and private universities in Catalonia. The CAR is composed of 5 Catalan academics proposed by the Catalan Government and 16 Catalan academics proposed by the chairperson of the committee. When exercising its functions, the CAR works through a series of subject and function-specific committees.

The **Appeals Committee** has been established recently. It is composed of a chairperson, appointed among the academic Board members proposed by the Inter-university Council of Catalonia, and two other members with technical expertise appointed by the Governing Board.

The Committee is responsible for ruling on appeals filed against decisions by the agency's review, certification and accreditation bodies. In all cases of appeal, the decision of the Committee is final. The Committee is also responsible for issuing reports that revise other reports issued by the agency's panels and committees, when stipulated in QA and certification procedures.

Advisory bodies

Next to those bodies, AQU Catalunya has a range of advisory bodies, involving different stakeholders:

- The **Committee of Vice-Rectors for quality assurance**, which is comprised of all the vice-rectors from the universities in Catalonia, provided feedback on the strategic and institutional aspects of AQU's activities and provides guidance on proposed QA methodologies.
- The **QA Technical Units Committee**, which is comprised of all the heads of the QA technical units at universities in Catalonia, provides feedback on the ways in which QA procedures and methodologies are applied.

- The **Student Advisory Committee**, comprised of students from universities in Catalonia, works to broaden and systemise the involvement of students in QA activities, to advise the agency on projects that have a direct impact on the student body, and participate in analytical studies that are of benefit to students.
- The **Committee of secretaries to the Social Councils of the public universities in Catalonia and interlocutors from the private universities**, manages the funding and monitoring of the graduate employment outcomes survey that is carried out once every three years.
- The **Surveys Technical Committee**, comprised of technical staff from all the universities in Catalonia who are specialists in carrying out surveys, coordinates the content and carrying out of surveys and data mining.

AQU CATALUNYA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

AQU Catalunya is the main instrument for the promotion and assurance of quality in the Catalan higher education system. The purpose of AQU Catalunya is the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality in the area of the universities and higher education centres of Catalonia.

AQU has requested this review to enable it to fulfil the ENQA membership and registration with the European Quality Assurance Register EQAR. This review has analysed all AQU Catalunya's activities that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary. The following activities of AQU Catalunya have been addressed in this external review:

1. Institutional level external reviews
2. Programme level external reviews
3. Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
4. International quality assurance by AQU Catalunya

Institutional level external reviews

The work of AQU Catalunya in the area of institutional review has focused on internal quality assurance systems, teaching assessment handbooks and research.

Ex-post IQAs certification

The AUDIT programme which promotes the use and implementation of internal quality assurance systems (IQAs) for programmes of study in Catalan universities was launched in 2007. There have been three stages to the programme:

- IQAs design orientation
- Review of IQAs design, prior to implementation
- IQAs implementation certification (ex-post IQAs certification)

By 2015, the entire university system in Catalonia had participated, together with eleven institutions running programmes in the Performing and Visual Arts, in the evaluation of the design and review of IQAs procedures. In the same year, AQU Catalunya started the certification of the implementation of those procedures.

Teaching assessment handbooks

AQU has worked closely with the universities since 2003 in developing and implementing models for the quality assurance of teaching and teaching staff, in order to support the universities in designing their own mechanisms for managing the quality assurance of teaching and teaching staff and to promote staff development and recognition, in accordance with the ESG (DOCENTIA programme).

Teaching assessment at Catalan universities is based on the application of the respective teaching assessment handbooks and takes place once every five years. Institutions design their handbooks according to set guidelines and AQU Catalunya subsequently certifies and then monitors implementation of the handbooks and lastly accredits their implementation for a period of five years.

Development of the handbook programme has been as follows:

- Public universities. 7 public universities in Catalonia have participated from the experimental stage (2003-2007), which was followed by the accreditation of their respective handbooks in 2009 and renewal of accreditation in 2014.
- Private universities. Five private universities in Catalonia participate, three of which are in the accreditation stage, while the other two are in the monitoring stage.

Research at department level

AQU Catalunya has developed a methodology to carry out the quality assurance of research at department level in institutions in Catalonia. The long-term purpose of the methodology is to consolidate the universities as top-level research organisations. In this respect, the method provides an instrument for improving policies for research, determining the type of research being conducted and identifying and prioritising the most dynamic areas and environments for research. This methodology is applicable to all fields of knowledge. A pilot project for the methodology was tested in all the departments (a total of 8) at the Pompeu Fabra University.

Institutional accreditation

In addition to the activities described above, the 2015 Royal Decree on institutional accreditation created the possibility for university centres to obtain self-accrediting power on two conditions:

- The centre or faculty must have received the above mentioned IQA implementation certification.
- At least half of the bachelor and master programmes offered by the centre of faculty must be accredited (ex-post).

At the time of this ENQA review, this new framework had not been implemented because the Royal Decree had not been developed yet.

Programme level external reviews

Since 2011, AQU Catalunya has implemented its VSMA Framework for the validation (ex-ante assessment), monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised awards, the purpose of which is the life-long quality assurance and continuous enhancement of degree courses. In 2016, the Governing Board endorsed a new version of the VSMA Framework that promotes institutional review.

Validation (ex-ante accreditation)

In Spain, every new degree programme must first submit the proposed course of studies to a process of ex-ante accreditation, or validation. AQU Catalunya is responsible for the preparation of ex-ante accreditation reports, which need to be validated by the Spanish Universities Council. Once a degree course has been validated, received authorisation by the Government of Catalonia, it is necessary for the programme to be introduced. This then takes place according to programming criteria across the university system and funding availability. Authorised programmes are then registered in the national Register of Higher Education Institutions and Degrees (RUCT), following which they can be introduced. The objective of validation (ex-ante accreditation) is to ensure that new courses of study are formulated in accordance with the requirements of the EHEA, the European qualifications framework, and that there is consistency of content and outcomes across subjects and disciplines.

Over the last five years, 878 courses of study underwent validation, 93% of which were favourable.

Monitoring

The main responsibility for follow-up in between two accreditation rounds is assigned to the university, with AQU Catalunya acting as an external agent of quality assurance. At least once every two years the universities are required to produce monitoring reports at faculty level in which they analyse programme delivery, and once every three years in the case of doctoral degrees. These reports are harmonised with the requirements of accreditation and are used as evidence in the external site visit. Faculties that are awarded a conditional accreditation (i.e. with prescriptions) are required to submit a monitoring report within two years of accreditation as evidence that stipulated improvements have been implemented.

Over 400 programmes have been monitored over the last five years.

Modification

Minor changes to improve a degree programme can be introduced autonomously.

Substantial modifications to an accredited degree that imply alterations to its structure, nature or objectives require approval by AQU Catalunya.

The procedure depends upon the extent of the changes:

- Allowable changes, which affect the structure of the degree, but where there is no change in its nature or objectives. Such changes can be requested as a result of a follow-up procedure. The university submits the proposal. The Universities Council reviews the enclosed documentation and, where necessary, requests any amendments. The definitive proposals are sent to AQU Catalunya and assigned to the competent subject-specific panel. The review panel issues an ex-ante modification report that is sent to the university, which can then present any supporting arguments. The panel assesses the supporting arguments and issues a final report for modification. This report is then referred to the Ministry of Education, Culture

and Sport and the Universities Council, which subsequently issues the corresponding resolution with the outcome of the modification process.

- Substantial changes that affect the nature and objectives of a validated degree and cannot be requested as a result of modification. Such changes can only be made through application for the validation of a new degree (ex-ante accreditation) and discontinuation of the degree course that is running.

Over the last five years 527 applications for proposed modifications were received, of which 96% were favourable.

Accreditation (ex-post)

All recognised degree courses must undergo accreditation within six years of validation (or within six years of a previous accreditation) in the case of Bachelor's and doctoral/PhD degrees, and four years in the case of Master's degrees. In order for a programme to retain its recognised status, a review including an external site visit is required, resulting in a positive report stating that the corresponding curriculum is being adhered to in accordance with the initial project.

Notwithstanding the fact that the administrative procedure for accreditation stipulated by the Ministry can only result in a "favourable" or "unfavourable" outcome, the agency has a system that provides for four outcomes:

1. accreditation with excellence (or "on track to excellence"),
2. accreditation,
3. accreditation with conditions (prescriptions), and
4. accreditation withheld.

Furthermore, the accreditation procedure includes the possibility of the voluntary review of programmes on three additional dimensions for them to be distinguished from other programmes: entry into work and employment outcomes; research-teaching linkages; and internationalisation.

Since 2014, a total of 183 site visits to institutions have been made and 633 programmes reviewed, with 439 programme accreditation reports being issued in the last two years. 17% of programmes were awarded accreditation with excellence, 74% were awarded accreditation, 9% were accredited with prescriptions and accreditation was only withheld from two programmes. 44 programmes were reviewed in different additional dimensions, of which 43 were successful in the following categories: 22 internationalisation, 8 in entry into work and employment outcomes, and 13 in research-teaching linkages.

Subject-specific quality seals and labels

The agency provides support to universities in Catalonia wishing to obtain a quality label, with the procedure being integrated as much as possible into the framework of accreditation, given compliance with certain characteristics. The approach is based on mutual recognition with other ENQA-recognised agencies that award quality seals and labels. Two agreements, one with the German quality assurance agency ASIIN and another with ANECA have enabled different joint external quality assurance procedures to be put into practice in Catalonia. Until now, 13 programmes have been awarded a label (either EUR-ACE or EURO-INF) in a procedure integrated into the AQU review process (10 with ASIIN and 3 with ANECA).

Review of institutions offering foreign degrees

Institutions wishing to offer programmes leading to qualifications awarded by a foreign institution that have no recognised degree-equivalent in Catalonia must be favourably evaluated by AQU Catalunya prior to authorisation by the Government of Catalonia. The quality assurance of such programmes is conditional on request by the Government of Catalonia. Two institutions were reviewed under this programme between 2012 and 2016.

International quality assurance by AQU Catalunya

AQU Catalunya also offers its services to foreign institutions. AQU Catalunya awards accreditation to institutions that can demonstrate academic rigour, reliability and trustworthiness as a partner institution for cooperation and academic mobility at international level, in particular with institutions in the university system in Catalonia. The agency has so far not promoted its offer for foreign institutions and has only complied with certain specific requests. Two institutions (from Peru and Mexico) took part in this programme in 2009, one of which applied for certificate renewal in 2016. Procedures are similar to those carried out in Catalonia. Upon a positive evaluation, programmes receive an AQU Catalunya-certificate that is valid for five years.

Quality of individual university faculty

Since 2003, AQU has carried out the pre-selection assessment of academic staff contracted at the public universities in Catalonia; since 2006, the agency has assessed the individual merits in teaching, research and management of teaching and research staff at Catalan universities within the framework of additional remuneration for academic staff.

Surveys

Next to its quality assurance activities, AQU Catalunya invests much resources in gathering data through surveys, such as the survey on graduate employment outcomes, the employer survey and the student satisfaction survey. Through these surveys the agency gathers a lot of data which it feeds back into the university system in order to support the quality assurance systems of the higher education institutions.

International activities

International accreditation and quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia have been mentioned above. In addition to these activities, the agency plays also an active role in international networks and projects.

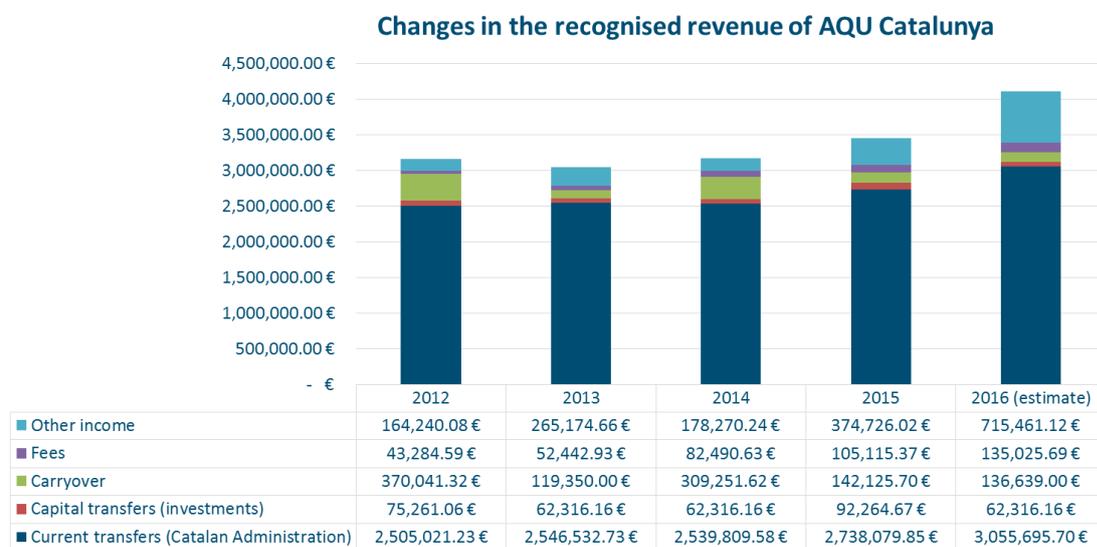
AQU Catalunya has been a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since the founding of the organisation in 2000. The agency was also one of the first to be registered with EQAR. Furthermore, the agency has played an active role in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and has hosted the network's Secretariat since October 2013. AQU Catalunya has also been an active member of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) since 2010.

Besides the active role the agency plays in international networks, over the last 5 years it has participated in 10 international projects and presented in 66 international forums.

AQU CATALUNYA'S FUNDING

The AQU Catalunya budget forms part of the budget of the Government of Catalonia that is annually approved by the Parliament of Catalonia. The agency's budget for 2016 was around 4 million euro.

Figure 2: The evolution of the AQU Catalunya budget



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

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Evidence

AQU Catalunya was established in 1996 as the primary instrument to promote quality assurance in the higher education system in Catalonia. Its purpose, objectives and principles of action are regulated by Law 15/2015, which formally sets out that AQU Catalunya is the external quality assurance agency for higher education in Catalonia.

AQU Catalunya has developed a Strategic Plan 2015-2018, which defines its mission, the values that drive the agency and its strategic areas of priority, and vision. Each year the Strategic plan is translated into an annual Action Plan. This plan is established based on internal consultation and endorsed by the Governing Board. It is the instrument that sets out the projects and activities to be carried out by AQU Catalunya during the year. The Action Plan is organised according to the same lines as the Strategic Plan. Each year the agency produces a summary annual report on the implementation of the Action Plan. The summary annual report is also endorsed by the Governing Board and made public.

AQU Catalunya has been carrying out activities associated with external quality assurance at different levels since its establishment twenty years ago. Its main external quality assurance activity is the compulsory implementation of the VSMA Framework, including ex-ante accreditation, modification, follow-up, and ex-post accreditation of bachelor, master and PhD programmes. The recently adopted, but not yet implemented national legislation on institutional accreditation might reduce the workload related to those activities.

In addition to the compulsory regular programme assessments and assessment of international programmes implemented in Catalonia, AQU Catalunya also implements evaluation schemes which are not compulsory for the evaluated institution, such as the accreditation of internal quality assurance systems and of teaching assessment handbooks. Furthermore, it assesses, on demand, programmes abroad.

The 2015 change in the legislation has allowed AQU Catalunya to further broaden the involvement of stakeholders. The Governing Board has a broad representation of Catalan stakeholders, including the rectors of all higher education institutions, representatives of the public universities' social councils which gather their stakeholders, government representatives, students and labour market representatives. Several advisory bodies have been established to involve specific stakeholders in the governance and work of AQU Catalunya, such as the Vice-Rectors Committee, QA technical units Committee, the Student Advisory Committee and the Surveys Technical Committee (cfr. p.11).

Analysis

The agency's quality assurance activities under review generally comply with Part 2 of the ESG. The agency fully complies with ESG 2.3, 2.5 and 2.7 and substantially complies with ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.4 and 2.6. Some areas for improvement have been identified by the panel related to ESG 1.3 and 1.4 (ESG 2.1), the agency's vision on the further development of the whole external quality assurance system in Catalonia (ESG 2.2), follow-up procedures (ESG 2.3), foreign experts and training of experts (ESG 2.4), publishing all reports and presenting results in an integrated and comparable way (ESG 2.6) and the (perceived) independence of the Appeals Committee (ESG 2.7).

The review panel recognises that AQU's mission statement has been published, both on its website and in its strategic plan. The statement gives a clear idea of the activities of the agency and the values it sticks to in its activities. Nevertheless, the review panel sees two dimensions of the agency's vision which could be further clarified. The first dimension is the line between internal and external quality assurance. The regulatory framework in which AQU Catalunya operates includes activities which in other countries are often taken up by higher education institutions themselves. Teaching staff needs external certification before they can be hired by universities, programmes need to be accredited ex-ante and ex-post. Major changes in between two accreditation procedures require the involvement of the agency. Additionally, voluntary procedures exist for the design and implementation of internal quality assurance procedures and procedures for the evaluation of the performance of teaching staff. In many higher education systems abroad the evaluation of the quality of teaching staff or changes in programmes in between accreditation rounds do not involve external quality assurance agencies. These elements are then considered to be part of internal quality assurance.

It is not up to the review panel to take a position on which activities should be performed by higher education institutions and which by the agency. However, taking into account the broader debate on the increased autonomy of higher education institutions, the review panel suggests that AQU Catalunya clarifies its vision on the differentiation between internal and external quality assurance and the consequential sharing of responsibilities between the agency and higher education institutions.

While the representation of Catalan stakeholders is clearly guaranteed, the involvement of international peers in review panels is still rather limited. The agency refers to extensive international ambitions which is expressed for example, in strategic objectives 1. "Promotion of the quality enhancement of higher education institutions and programmes through an efficient cyclical programme of review and assessment that takes into account the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and uses and applies international benchmarks" and objective 13. "We have a sufficient number of collaborators and experts of recognised standing who contribute added value to the Agency's activities and are satisfied being involved with AQU Catalunya". Also several representatives of higher institutions expressed clear international ambitions which also involved a role for the agency supporting these. Taking into account those ambitions the involvement of international experts is an important area for improvement. In the Research Assessment Committee (CAR) only Catalan academics are represented, while the Institutional and Programme Review Committee (CAIP) includes several international members. Also in the subject-specific committees and the review panels there is clearly room for an increase in the involvement of international experts. The panel commends the agency for the systematic presence of not only students, but also representatives of the labour market in the review panels for accreditation procedures.

In addition to its quality assurance activities, the agency has a separate unit which has created a comprehensive system of data collection. On the one hand it provides a framework for data collection

to the higher education institutions, which need to be uploaded to UNEIX. The agency extracts those data from UNEIX and makes them accessible for higher education institutions and the broader public in order to allow all actors to compare them. On the other hand, the agency coordinates with Catalan universities data collection through a range of surveys. The collected data are provided to the institutions to be used in their internal procedures. It is positive that those activities are clearly separated from the external quality assurance activities.

Furthermore, the panel has learned that the agency provided training to the *Universidad de San Martín de Porres*, Peru in order to implement an improvement plan based on recommendations from an earlier review performed by AQU Catalunya. It should be taken into account that the agency has performed only 2 international accreditation procedures and that the training activities have only been offered once, dating back to 2011. Nevertheless, such activities should be considered as consultancy/support activities. Should the agency wish to offer these kind of activities then they should be differentiated more cautiously from the quality assurance activities which are provided by AQU Catalunya.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Evidence

AQU Catalunya has been formally recognised by the Catalan legislation since its establishment in 1996. This legislation has been updated in 2003 and 2015, but the recognition of AQU Catalunya as the quality assurance agency for higher education in Catalonia has remained a crucial part of the legislation.

AQU Catalunya has been created as a separate legal entity with its own legal personality and patrimony. It is subject to private law, but comes under the jurisdiction of the competent department of the Government of Catalonia with jurisdiction over universities.

This legal framework encompasses the activities that AQU Catalunya can undertake and, as such, the agency fulfils and complies with all of the requirements of the jurisdiction in which it operates. Its activities of quality assurance, accreditation and certification are considered to be administrative actions or proceedings that are subject to public law and its safeguards.

In the case of external programme review, the corresponding legislation (Royal Decree) lays down that quality assurance agencies must issue assessment reports for the start, modification and renewal of programme accreditation; and in the latter case of foreign institutions, pursuant to Law 1/2003 19 February on universities in Catalonia, the authorisation to establish educational institutions that issue

foreign awards and qualifications is conditional on *the issuance of a favourable preliminary report by AQU Catalunya*. AQU Catalunya is therefore fully recognised to undertake both of these activities under the existing legal framework.

Analysis

Based on the evidence provided by the agency, it is obvious that AQU Catalunya has a clear legal basis. Activities involving external programme review, more specifically validation, modification and accreditation, and the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia are activities carried out for regulatory purposes. Additionally, the agency is allowed to offer voluntary quality assurance services to higher education institutions.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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.

Evidence

Catalan Law 15/2015 enshrines the independence of AQU Catalunya. Article 1 of the Law establishes that *“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.”*

This legislation also increased the agency's independence from the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia. Before the Executive Council was in charge of the appointment of several functions within the agency, which is not any longer the case. The academic members of the Governing Board are now nominated by the Inter-university Council of Catalonia. The agency's director and the chair persons of the commissions are now appointed by the Governing Board.

Furthermore, the law states (in article 18) that the agency *“(...) 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.”*

This mandate is incorporated in the agency's new Statutes and the internal rules of procedure of the Governing Board and its Standing Committee, the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) and the Research Assessment Commission (CAR), as well as all external review procedures.

The experts for the review panels are nominated by the chairpersons of the relevant Commission (CAIP of CAR). The profiles and prerequisites are public and adapted according to the review requisites. Furthermore, each reviewer has to accept the *“Commitment to comply with AQU Catalunya's principles of action, its values, Code of Ethics and Policy for quality and information security, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”*.

AQU's reports are produced by the peer review panels and are revised in parallel by the review panel and the subject or function-specific committee, bearing in mind that the review panels are more aware of the actual delivery of each programme because they have carried out the site visit whereas the perspective of the subject or function-specific committee is more comprehensive. Both the panels and the committees are independent from the institution under review.

Analysis

The Catalan legislation stipulates the independence of the agency from the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia explicitly. The 2015 modifications of the legislation clearly contributed to the agency's organisational independence of the Catalan Government. The government is no longer directly involved with the appointment of senior staff members. Also the academic members of international standing on the Governing Board, nor the chairperson and four members of the Research Assessment Committee are appointed anymore by the government. Those appointments are now the responsibility of the Governing Board of the agency in which all stakeholders are represented. However, the changes in the legislation did not increase the agency's independence of the Catalan higher education institutions. All rectors of Catalan higher education institutions are now members of the Governing Board, as well as 7 representatives of Social Councils of the public universities and 3 academics who are employed by a Catalan university.

On the level of financial dependency, the planned shift from annual grants from the Catalan Government to a four-year funding contract will definitely increase the financial independence of the agency. Nevertheless, a large part of the agency's resources still comes from the Catalan Government, which incurs a level of dependence on this government.

The operational independence from external stakeholders is largely guaranteed through the legislation and the internal procedures of the agency. The Governing Board, which includes representatives of the different stakeholder groups, is not involved in the development of the procedures. The two Commissions have full autonomy for this. The review panel notices that there is no clear separation between the composition of the CAIP and CAR on the one hand and the technical committees and review panels on the other hand. The supervising Commission appoints among its members the chair persons of the technical committees. Also the chair persons of 27% of the review panels are appointed among the members of the technical committees. The agency acknowledges that this procedure aims to have a better overview of the programmes and institutions evaluated and give more consistency in the application of the procedures and criteria. Nevertheless, in the view of the overlap in members between the different layers might also create some unwanted and unintended interference between the different roles. Although the mentioned bodies are collegiate decision-making bodies, the review panel recommends 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 appointment of external experts is undertaken independently from third parties. All members also sign the code of ethics and ensures that potential conflicts of interest are avoided. Nevertheless, the panel noticed a strong commitment and involvement of the Catalan higher education institutions in the structures of AQU Catalunya. While this commitment shows a strong support for quality assurance and the work of the agency, the panel has some reservations about the current level of involvement of people who are active within the Catalan higher education system. As a rather small ecosystem the Catalan higher education system may be more exposed to the perception of conflicts of interest. This concern was further strengthened during the review panel's meetings with high-level representatives of the higher education institutions. During these meetings, the review panel noticed

regularly that those institutional representatives did not separate explicitly their roles in the management of their own institution and their roles as members of bodies within AQU Catalunya. Hence, the review panel recommends that the agency should consider embedding a closer understanding of the importance of the division of roles.

Furthermore, the panel suggests that the agency re-evaluates the current balance of membership of the committee and governance structures, between people from within the system and those from outside the system. An increased participation of people from outside Catalonia might not only be positive for the level of independence in the system, but also for the international recognition and innovation through the introduction of new ideas. One clear example where a perception of a lack of independence may arise is the composition of the Appeals Committee. While the review panel is convinced of the quality and integrity of the current three members of this committee, it would still be good to involve enough experts from outside the system to cope with the perceptions and actual conflict of interest in particular where more complex cases will proceed to judicial review.

Although there is a balanced representation of the academic field, the labour market and students in the review panels, the formal outcomes of all reviews remain the responsibility of the agency.

Lastly, as already indicated under ESG 3.1 the agency performed training activities in one of its two international accreditation procedures. In case the agency receives a similar request in the future, it should carefully differentiate between its quality assurance procedures and consultancy/support activities in order to maintain independence in its quality assurance procedures.

Panel recommendations

- 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.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Evidence

Recently, the agency started with the production of reports on specific programmes, such as the *“Report on the situation of Design studies in Catalonia within the regulatory framework of programmes in the Performing Arts and Visual Arts in the European Higher Education Area”*. Also in the field of teacher education, AQU Catalunya has produced several reports. Those reports provide an analysis of the general findings in a certain area of study based on all activities AQU Catalunya carries out. In some cases, those reports also contain policy recommendations for the Catalan Government.

Long before AQU Catalunya started to produce thematic analysis reports, it published already other reports and data which are not linked to specific assessment procedures. Meta-evaluation reports on validation (ex-ante accreditation), modification and follow-up procedures provide an analysis of the way in which procedures have been implemented. The agency also monitors its activities and results, and presents the results periodically to the advisory committees and QA commissions. The results of all those monitoring procedures are summarized in the Annual Report, which is referred to the Governing Board for its approval and then published and posted on the AQU Catalunya website.

Furthermore, the agency carries out surveys on graduate employment outcomes and on employers' perceptions regarding the employability of recent graduates. Based on those data, reports are published, e.g. on the opinions of companies regarding the preparation and training of production engineers and on the cross-referencing of data on university supply and demand with employment outcomes. Some studies have benchmarked the results with other Spanish regions or the quarterly survey of the working population. In addition, a project is being developed through the Catalan Institute for Statistics to obtain annual registry information from the Social Security authorities in order to complete a three-year study.

Analysis

One of the changes in the 2015 ESG in comparison with the previous ones is that the actual purpose of this standard was made even more explicit. The purpose of this standard is to encourage agencies to use and disseminate findings of their external quality assurance activities through the analysis and publication of generic conclusions which result from the aggregation of individual quality assurance procedures. Those reports should provide *“material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts. A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.”* Although the review panel values the broad range of reports AQU Catalunya has produced in the past, only the recent reports which integrate the results of quality assurance procedures such as ex-ante and ex-post accreditation, as well as the results of the surveys AQU carries out, fully comply with the focus of this Standard. The review panel positively evaluates the first reports of this kind the agency has published and encourages it to implement its plans to publish at least 4 reports of this kind annually. Moreover, the review panel is convinced that AQU Catalunya has the potential to expand on these reports or in this area by adding valuable thematic analyses based upon the extensive data it gathers through its broad range of activities.

As indicated above, AQU Catalunya has produced meta-analysis reports on several of its evaluation procedures. Those reports document the evaluations performed together with a broad range of stakeholders. The panel recommends that the agency publishes similar meta-analysis reports on all its quality assurance procedures, as they offer a good basis for continuous improvement. In the view of the panel, the agency could, however, demonstrate more explicitly how findings or outcomes of those meta-analyses published reports contributed to the improvement of quality assurance procedures.

Furthermore, the review panel appreciates the ambition of AQU Catalunya to provide personalised reports to each higher education institution, based on all review procedures that it has performed.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- AQU should plan carefully for staffing demands when all four elements of the Framework (including Accreditation) come into play.

Evidence

The AQU Catalunya budget forms part of the budget of the Government of Catalonia that is annually approved by the Parliament of Catalonia. The agency's budget for 2015 was 3.5 million euro.

AQU Catalunya has a team of 35 people, many of whom have worked for the agency for more than 10 years. The technical staff, which represents around two-thirds of all the staff, manages and participates not only in external QA activities, but also provides support in drawing up the reports on quality assurance and review procedures; coordinating, developing and carrying out analytical studies and surveys (on graduate employment outcomes, satisfaction, etc.) for knowledge generation; participating in international projects and network; and disseminating the knowledge and information acquired by way of articles and the presentation of papers at congresses, symposia and workshops. AQU Catalunya has also its own IT section that manages all software applications, it develops new applications to cover all of the agency's requirements regarding its quality assurance activities, and it has the necessary technical infrastructure to carry out all of its activities.

In 2015, the Strategic Policy for Human Resources was approved, which sets out the guidelines and values upheld by AQU Catalunya in this sphere for efficient staff management. The main objective was to build up an organisation that is efficient, flexible, open and enhancement and results-based with a team of competent, creative, motivated and satisfied people.

AQU Catalunya occupies a total useful floor area of 385m² in the building at Carrer dels Vergós, 36-42 of Barcelona, together with the shared use of seven meeting rooms and an auditorium, which are sufficient for the agency to carry out its activities. Workshops are organised in collaboration with the universities, which often make their facilities available for use.

Analysis

With regard to the agency's economic resources, the medium-term challenge consists of the drawing up and securing approval of the agency's contract programme with the Government of Catalonia. The 2015 legislation has established a new process to come to a funding agreement for a four-year period.

The review panel welcomes this tendency towards a four-year budget, which will allow the agency to plan more on the medium to longer term.

Since the previous review of the agency, (ex-post) accreditation has been implemented. This created an increase in the workload of the agency. The agency planned its staffing demands to implement this new framework. However, the economic situation did not facilitate a big increase in the size of the team. The team has been sufficient in order to implement a broad range of activities recently, but based on the feedback it received during the site visit, the panel concludes that little time was available to prepare as a team for a system of institutional accreditation and for the implementation of the ambitions to further increase the international dimension of the agency. In order to facilitate this process, it is important that staff have opportunities to expand their competences, skills and knowledge through their involvement in thematic analyses, participation in different projects, workshops etc. The panel commends the team for the work it has carried out. Although the time investment of each staff member is monitored continuously, the panel learned during its meetings with the staff that the pressure on the staff in order to implement all the agency's activities has been significant and the team appeared exhausted. Although the number of review procedures might diminish slightly in the coming years, new challenges await the agency. The agency will need to ensure that the workload of each staff member is reduced to a level which is sustainable for the long term. Moreover, the agency should invest enough staff time allow for more strategic consideration and reflection and prepare for the cultural shift which will be needed for, a new approach to what is currently internal and external quality assurance, if the move towards institutional accreditation is to be implemented. If the agency wants to keep all its current activities and continue to perform them at a high quality, an extension of the team will be necessary in the opinion of the panel.

The panel values the establishment of a strategic human resources plan. The panel hopes this plan will help to further develop the cooperation within the team and among the different departments in order to fully benefit from the available knowledge and competences. The panel commends the first steps which have been taken towards more project oriented work. Further steps in this direction might help to further develop the organisation and its capacity to deal with more transformational change. Although the panel greatly values the commitment of the long standing staff and the stability and experience accumulated it provided, it also considers that it is important to find ways to renew the team and bring new ideas and approaches. This might be by hiring new people, but also through collaboration and exchanges with other agencies. A long standing team risks to grow into fixed patterns, which might reduce the capacity to think strategically and adapt the work of the agency to new challenges. This seems particularly important given the strategic objectives stated by the agency to change its major focus and methodologies.

Furthermore, in the area of training, the panel sees room for improvement. Some initial steps were taken, but there was limited evidence that human resources' management is strongly articulated with the priorities of the agency. Hence, the training plan the panel received does not show a strong strategic approach, yet, though this may be consolidated in the near future and there seems to exist the willingness to pursue that.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the whole team for the way it managed the heavy workload during the past years, with dedication and effectiveness while staying connected to developments in Europe.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term.
- The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.
- The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Evidence

The agency's quality and information security management system is based on AQU Catalunya's quality and information security policy, which is available on the agency's website. This policy is embodied in:

- The values, mission and vision of the agency as set out in its Strategic Plan for 2015-2018.
- The principles established in the Code of Ethics, which guides the conduct of the people who work and act on behalf of the agency (staff and external experts).
- External review in accordance with European and international standards.
- An externally certified quality management and information security system based on the international ISO 9001 quality management standard and the ISO 27001 information security management standard, which guarantee the quality of the internal processes carried out by AQU Catalunya and its commitment to information security.

The quality assurance of processes is guaranteed by the development of instructions and procedures for internal processes and public review guides for all external quality assurance activities the agency performs.

The management of the agency, through its Quality and Information Security Committee, undertakes a comprehensive revision of the internal quality assurance system once every year, which also takes into account the meta-evaluation by the heads of the different sections and projects. The conclusions of this review are drawn up once a year in a Report, which is circulated throughout the entire organisation to help raise the levels of motivation and commitment among all of the agency's staff and contribute to the continuous enhancement of its processes and activities.

Furthermore, in relation to the guidelines under this standard:

- The training policy aims to ensure that all persons involved in the agency's activities are competent. AQU Catalunya gives specific training to experts for each project and has an approved training scheme for AQU staff based on the system for assessing professional skills and staff training requirements for each project or activity. One of the documents used as a guide reference is the *ENQA Quality assurance professional competencies framework (2016)*.
- The agency has internal and external feedback mechanisms, in which the opinions of internal and external users are gathered and taken into account by way of the petitions and surveys portal, for internal users, and the corporate mailboxes, satisfaction surveys, proceedings of meetings and direct communication (telephone calls, e-mails, postal mail) for external users. These mechanisms end with the annual system meta-evaluation, which drives the continuous improvement of the system.
- AQU Catalunya's human resources policy (2015) lays down that *"any form of psychological or sexual harassment or discrimination is prohibited, and that procedures for action shall be established to actively detect and eliminate any such form of behaviour"*. In this regard, an internal committee has been set up to draw up an Equality Plan, in accordance with the regulations of the Government of Catalonia.
- The Catalan Government is represented in the Governing Board, which monitors the agency's activities.
- The agency does not subcontract or outsource any QA activity in the higher education system in Catalonia to third parties.
- AQU Catalunya operates in the university system in Catalonia and, on demand, undertakes external QA activities in accordance with the ESG.

Analysis

The agency clearly defines processes and procedures for all its activities. It also has structures in place for assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its work. All those efforts culminate in the external ISO-certification of the agency's activities.

Moreover, the panel recognises the efforts achieved by the agency to implement processes for internal quality assurance taking into account the European Standards and Guidelines. The agency listed the recommendations of the two previous ENQA reviews and indicated whether those have been implemented. Efforts have been made in order to implement nearly all recommendations. Nevertheless, while the agency generally qualifies the efforts as completed, the panel does not consider that all of the recommendations are fully implemented, yet. For example, the use of international experts needs to be improved upon. As indicated under the corresponding standards of Part 2, the system of quality assurance activities could further develop to become more coherent and integrated. Finding the right balance between all the activities should also be an ongoing concern.

To conclude, the panel found clear evidence of the gradual improvement in the work of the agency as a result of internal quality assurance processes which clearly comply with the ESG. A next step in the development of the agency may be to assume a more strategic approach to its internal quality assurance. The Governing Board is informed in detail about all the work the agency does. However, the panel found less evidence in preparatory documents, reports and feedback from the board members on how the Governing Board uses feedback from all stakeholders in order to develop a clear vision on how quality assurance should develop in Catalonia.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Evidence

As a founding member of ENQA, AQU Catalunya was one of the first agencies for which ENQA coordinated an external review and it was one of the first agencies to be listed on the EQAR register. The agency's review in 2017 was the third review of this type carried out, following previous reviews in 2007 and 2012.

In addition to the dedication of the agency, the Catalan legislation (Law 15/2015) requires that both the promotion and quality assurance of higher education are in accordance with the European standards for quality and, in this regard, it establishes the obligation of undergoing a periodic cyclical review. *"In accordance with international standards and guidelines for quality assurance, AQU Catalunya shall, at the proposal of the Governing Board, undergo a regular international external review of the quality of the services it provides for the purpose of the Agency's continuous improvement and external recognition"*.

Analysis

The review panel has confirmed the commitment of the agency and of the regional Government of Catalonia in following the ESG, expressed in the Catalan legislation, and also in the meetings during the site visit. AQU Catalunya is committed and required to undergo a cyclical review at least every five years so as to renew its membership by demonstrating compliance with the ESG and the steps taken to follow up on any recommendations provided.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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 1 of the ESG.

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- The form and demands of the progress report in the VSMA Framework should be more closely focused on ESG Part 1.
- In the arrangements that apply under the new law, AQU should continue to focus on the internal quality management of HEIs, which was a feature of the Audit programme.

Evidence

The activities of AQU Catalunya are subject to national and regional regulation and the degree of regulation is comprehensive. The legal framework assigns a substantial number of tasks to the agency, which range from the implementation of programme accreditation to institutional reviews, and

include as well several reviews of individual staff members of higher education institutions. In the introductory part of this report, the different activities have been described in more detail.

AQU Catalunya has worked towards the goal that its external quality assurance procedures are comprehensively designed and carried out taking into account the effectiveness of the internal processes described in Part 1 of the ESG. According to AQU Catalunya, all the activities related to programme evaluation, as well as the ex-post certification of internal quality assurance systems, contribute to the 10 standards of Part 1. The evaluation of teaching assessment handbooks does not focus on design and approval of programmes (1.2) and student admission, progression, recognition and certification (1.4)

The table below is an extract from the AQU self-assessment report (pages 75-76) indicating the alignment of AQU Catalunya’s evaluation schemes with the ESG, Part 1.

Table 2: Self-assessment of the compliance with ESG Part 1

Type of assessment	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
Ex-ante accreditation	3.9	3.5/3.9	3.3/3.5/3.8	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.9	3.9	4/5	5
Monitoring	3.3	3.3	3.1/3.6	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.2	4/5	5
Ex-post accreditation	3.3	3.3	3.1/3.6	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.2	4/5	5
Ex-post IQAs certification	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.6	4/5	5
Teaching assessment handbooks	B		D/E		D	D	A/B/C	C/E	A/B	A/B/F
International accreditation	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	4/5	5
Foreign institutions in Catalonia	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4/5	5

Analysis

In the following paragraphs the panel describes to which extent the external quality assurance procedures used by AQU Catalunya assess the effectiveness of higher education institutions’ internal quality assurance processes in relation to the standards described in Part 1 of the revised ESG.

The panel’s analysis is done on the basis of a re-assessment of the consistency of the evaluation procedures with ESG Part 1. Hence, the table above does not provide much explanation of how the evaluation criteria are aligned exactly to the ESG. Based on its re-assessment, the review panel is of the opinion that some of the references provided by the agency are not fully supported by the evidence provided in the specific guides.

The analysis is provided for each of the four activities which the peer review was required to assess:

1. Institutional level external reviews
2. Programme level external review
3. Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
4. International quality assurance by AQU Catalunya

AQU Catalunya has developed a policy on subject-specific quality seals and labels. This policy is based on mutual recognition with other ENQA-recognised agencies that award quality seals and labels. The agency provides support to universities in Catalonia wishing to obtain a quality label, with the procedure being integrated as much as possible into the framework of accreditation, given compliance with certain characteristics. Two agreements, one with the German quality assurance agency ASIIN (Framework collaboration agreement and Specific collaborative agreement) and another with ANECA (cooperation agreement), were entered into that have enabled different joint external quality assurance procedures to be put into practice in Catalonia. Those joint procedures result in a double report, one based on AQU’s assessment framework and one based on the framework of the subject-specific label. Only the first report is the responsibility of AQU Catalunya. Hence, the review panel did not analyse the latter procedures.

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

AQU Catalunya has procedures in place to check whether higher education institutions have a policy for quality assurance in place. This element is taken into account in the mandatory procedures at programme level (ex-ante accreditation, follow-up and ex-post accreditation). The topic is also explicitly tackled in the procedures for the recognition of foreign degrees which are offered in Catalonia.

Also the institutional level procedures take the quality assurance policy into account. The AUDIT programme is a separate and voluntary evaluation scheme which certifies internal quality assurance systems. It helps Departments and Faculties to develop robust internal quality assurance systems. All Catalan universities take part in this system. Additionally, there is a separate scheme for the evaluation of teaching assessment handbooks where the quality assurance policy on the quality of teaching staff is tackled.

In the new legal framework for institutional accreditation, certification of the quality assurance system is one of the mandatory requirements in order to obtain this accreditation.

In the procedures for international accreditation, the focus on quality assurance policies is rather limited in the indicators. This element might be strengthened.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

In Catalonia, official study programmes organised by Catalan or foreign institutions require an external assessment before they may be offered. Also structural changes need to be assessed by AQU Catalunya (modification). Additionally, the ex-post certification of internal quality assurance systems does also focus on how institutions organise the design and approval of their programmes. Lastly, in the assessment framework for international accreditation the design and approval of programmes and the learning outcomes are tackled in quite general terms.

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

The major change in the 2015 ESG is the focus on student-centred learning. This standard focuses on how students are encouraged to take an active role in creating their learning process. The assessment of students should reflect this. The panel noticed that none of the stakeholders it discussed this issue with demonstrated an acknowledgement of the significant shift that is required in order to fully adapt the agency's procedures to the focus of this standard. Indeed several stakeholders the review panel met, explained student-centred learning as 'defining learning outcomes', 'a shift from knowledge to competences' or 'the use of more interactive teaching methods'. While these elements might contribute to a more student-centred approach, achieving real student-centred learning requires a more holistic understanding of the concept.

The framework for ex-post accreditation mentions 'effective learning processes'. This is a clear step in the right direction. Other assessment frameworks focus on assessment (accreditation of degrees provided by foreign institutions and international accreditation). In the framework for international accreditation, also the use of different modes of delivery. Nevertheless, a more holistic approach is required in order to make quality assurance contribute fully to a transition towards student-centred learning.

The same issue is valid for procedures for reviews at institutional level. These should also be further developed in order to fully take into account a student-centred learning approach. Indeed, the organisation of quality assurance and the evaluation of teaching staff requires a different approach

when students receive an active role in the design of their learning process. Teaching staff will need to be retrained from educator to coach. Assessing the quality of teaching will also require new approaches.

So, overall, the panel suggests to the agency to commence planning immediately to create an awareness and integrate this strengthened focus of the 2015 ESG on student-centred learning more explicitly in the evaluation frameworks it uses.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

The consistent application of pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the students "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification is not consistently assessed in AQU Catalunya's procedures. Nevertheless, in general terms some of these aspects are touched upon within the evaluation frameworks, with most attention for student admission procedures. This is the case in the framework for ex-ante and ex-post accreditation and for international institutions offering degrees in Catalonia. In the latter case, student progression is also tackled explicitly. In the procedures for international accreditation, student progress and recognition are explicit elements for evaluation. The other elements of this standard are not assessed explicitly.

At the institutional level, the certification of internal quality assurance systems takes into account how institutions manage student progress and mentoring in order to guarantee that certification is offered correctly. The assessment of teaching assessment handbooks does not tackle those topics.

Overall, the agency should reassess its evaluation frameworks and make sure that all frameworks take into account ESG 1.4 in a consistent way.

1.5 Teaching staff

Quality assurance of teaching staff is an important part of the work of AQU Catalunya, which evaluates individual staff and assesses the quality of teaching teams and staff policy in several evaluation procedures. In the case of programme review procedures, such as the accreditation procedure, the accreditation of degrees offered by foreign institutions and international accreditation, quality assurance of teaching staff is taken into account explicitly as it is one of the criteria established in the evaluation guides. Other evaluation activities are also relevant in this respect, such as the certification of teaching assessment handbooks which supports universities in designing their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their academic staff. Finally, the evaluation of research, in which AQU Catalunya is currently involved, is also relevant to ensure the quality of the teaching staff.

1.6 Learning resources and student support

The agency evaluates learning resources and student support in the programme reviews, including the ex-ante and ex-post accreditation procedures, the accreditation of degrees offered by foreign institutions and international accreditation. Criteria are the supporting staff and services and the learning resources available for students.

In the ex-post IQAs certification procedure, procedures related to learning resources and student support systems are assessed explicitly.

1.7 Information management

At the programme level, the assessment procedures (including the ex-ante and ex-post accreditation procedures, the accreditation of degrees offered by foreign institutions and international accreditation) take into account the information collected by the study programme and the way this

is followed up by higher education institutions. It is an explicit criterion that institutions have a regular and effective system of collecting and analysing relevant information and outcomes. In the case of the evaluation of teaching assessment handbooks, the information about the quality of teaching is gathered and evaluated. In the ex-post certification of internal quality assurance systems, information management is an inherent requirement for a positive assessment of the system.

AQU Catalunya takes a specific position in the higher education institutions in Catalonia concerning information management. Where this is a typical role of institutions in most higher education systems, in Catalonia AQU plays a central role in gathering and providing data to the higher education institutions. With the support of private partners and the Government, the agency performs a broad range of surveys (graduates, employers, etc.). AQU Catalunya has also built several IT systems in which it gathers data about higher education provision in Catalonia. The agency returns this data to the institutions in standardised formats.

1.8 Public information

Public information plays a crucial role in the external quality assurance processes of AQU Catalunya. The agency pays particular attention to publicising those procedures and results. This is regarded as a central criterion in the programme evaluation procedures. In the ex-post certification of internal quality assurance systems, information management is an inherent requirement for a positive assessment of the system.

In addition to the reports on its quality assurance processes, AQU Catalunya publishes a broad range of data about the higher education system, institutions and individual programmes. This data is the output from the work mentioned under 1.7. Although the data contains a valuable source of information for society, integration of the available qualitative and quantitative data would add value to the present public information and could help to reach a wider public. The thematic analysis reports which have been published recently are nice examples of how this can be done.

1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

After the initial ex-ante accreditation, re-accreditation is required after 4 (for master's degrees) or 6 years (for bachelor's degrees and PhD degrees). In between, each higher education is supposed to implement follow-up procedures.

Furthermore, the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards is a crucial element in the voluntary evaluation of internal quality assurance systems.

1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

The national Spanish regulations imply that higher education institutions need to undergo regular programme reviews for re-accreditation of programmes (every 6 years for undergraduate and PhD programmes and every 4 years for master programmes). This responsibility is taken by AQU Catalunya for all institutions in Catalonia.

Institutional level evaluations (quality assurance systems and teaching assessment handbooks) are also based on on-going monitoring and periodic review. Through those procedures the agency continued to focus on internal quality management, as recommended by the 2012 review.

The ex-ante assessment of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia is only required at the start of a new degree.

International accreditation procedures are never compulsory as higher education institutions must submit themselves to these voluntarily. Therefore, the agency does not have any means to guarantee that institutions request periodic reviews. The panel accepts that for this kind of review on-going monitoring and periodic review is difficult to guarantee but should be included where feasible.

Summary

The panel is confident that the broad range of AQU's external quality assurance activities takes into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes in the universities described in Part 1 of the ESG. Based on its meetings with stakeholders it is clear to the panel that AQU's work has contributed to the awareness of quality assurance and the ESG within the Catalan higher education system. Those stakeholders also recognize the major contribution of the agency's work towards the development of a quality culture in the Catalan higher education system.

The 2012 review recommended AQU Catalunya to "continue to focus on the internal quality management of HEIs, which was a feature of the voluntary Audit programme". The panel also recommended to review the VSMA-framework. Such a review took place. The panel's analysis of the protocols and practice of the agency's different activities indicates that most of the items considered in the ESG Part 1 are now covered to a substantial degree. Nevertheless, the agency should integrate the concept of student-centred learning more systematically in its procedures and work (ESG 1.3). Furthermore, the agency should pay attention to the extent to which student admission, progression, recognition and certification are evaluated (ESG 1.4). Especially in the procedures for international accreditation, the focus on quality assurance policies is rather limited in the indicators. This element might be strengthened.

Panel recommendations

- 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.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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.

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- AQU should pay particular attention to the ways in which the functions now carried out by CLiC (AQU Commission that dealt with tenure-track and collaborating teaching staff) and CAR Research Assessment Commission) and within the "Docentia" programme may be brought more closely together.

Evidence

The purpose and objectives are defined before the procedures are developed. The purpose of each procedure is also set out in the first section of each guidebook.

Technical staff at AQU Catalunya design, produce and implement the methodology of the different evaluation procedures on the basis of the defined purpose and objectives, external benchmarks and standards (Spain and international).

Either the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) or the Research Assessment Commission (CAR), is responsible for the approval of new methodologies and the modification of existing methodologies. Approval is undertaken independently although with consideration, where applicable, of any aspects noted by the advisory committees of vice-rectors and QA technical units. The guidebooks are also discussed in the respective subject and/or function-specific committees. Other stakeholder groups are also consulted when appropriate.

Whenever possible, voluntary pilot or experimental programmes are run to test the consistency of new proposed methodologies, for example, the programme dealing with the quality assurance of research at university department-level (2015).

AQU Catalunya has the ambition that, prior to starting a review process, all stakeholders, external reviewers and those being reviewed understand the purpose, the objectives and the methodology that is to be applied. Therefore, each new methodology is disseminated on the website, the quarterly newsletter and Twitter, so that it is accessible for consultation by the stakeholders concerned. In some cases, a specific workshop or presentation event is organised, and/or a video is produced to explain the procedure.

Once implemented, AQU also invests in the regular follow-up of the implementation of each procedure. This is done in the advisory committees of the agency, as well as in the commissions which are responsible for the procedures. For some evaluation procedures, meta-evaluations are carried out (e.g. the ex-ante accreditation and modification procedures), which lead to updates in the procedures when deemed necessary.

Analysis

AQU Catalunya performs a broad range of quality assurance procedures in a highly-regulated context. Often the purpose and the objectives of those procedures are defined externally. While the objectives of the individual procedures are clearly defined, the overarching vision on the whole external quality assurance system is less developed. Although the panel is aware of the limited possibilities for the agency to influence the decisions which are taken in this regard at National (Spanish) level, it recommends the agency takes a more pro-active stance in the development of a clear own vision on where the whole external quality assurance system in Catalonia, and Spain, should progress towards. It would be relevant to involve its stakeholders in this process.

In its discussions with stakeholders, the ambition to go towards an 'institutional accreditation' system was often advocated. It was not clear, however, what this should look like, and what the impact would be on the role of the external quality assurance agency, the institutional governance and internal quality assurance of higher education institutions. The current Spanish legislation allows for the awarding of 'institutional accreditation' to faculties or schools. Units receive this accreditation based on the ex-post certification of their internal quality assurance system and the ex-post accreditation of half of their programmes. While the agency indicates in its VSMA framework that the final goal is to move towards self-accrediting institutions, the different pathways it describes remain fundamentally

based on a combination of the accreditation of quality assurance systems in combination with detailed accreditation procedures of (a part of) the individual study programmes. With this framework AQU provides a framework for the implementation of the Spanish legislation from the moment this framework is fully operational. Nevertheless, in the view of the review panel, AQU Catalunya should develop a clear vision on the consequences of its ambition to move towards self-accrediting institutions and more institutional autonomy. In the view of the panel the current combination of procedures does not in itself lead to more institutional autonomy. Therefore, the panel is convinced that the agency should develop a clear view on whether all current procedures fit within its overall vision. The current focus seems to be on the implementation of the current regulatory framework, rather than on how the framework should develop in order to fully achieve the stated ambitions in relation to the autonomy of higher education institutions. This is supported by some trends which can be perceived as contradictory, such as the tendency to further detail evaluation criteria and to develop rubrics in the new accreditation framework for programmes on the one hand and the tendency towards more institutional autonomy on the other hand.

The review panel is convinced that AQU Catalunya, based on its long-standing history, its experience and its expertise, should be able to have a greater impact on the development of the legislation on quality assurance in Spain. It could take a leading role in the policy debate by proposing a clear and shared overall vision on the whole quality assurance system.

At the level of each individual procedure, the agency invests in the clear definition and communication of each procedure. Although the agency performs in a highly-regulated context, it also tries to moderate and adapt the procedures as much as possible to local needs and specificities. This is done in close collaboration with different stakeholders. During the visit, the panel identified a broad appreciation for the efforts of the agency to interact closely and fruitfully with higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

Wherever relevant, the agency invests in the extensive preparation of new procedures, sometimes with pilots, in order to fine-tune the evaluation schemes. Once the procedures are implemented the agency also invests in the further development of each evaluation scheme. The practice of meta-evaluation of evaluation procedures contributes to the continuous improvement of the work of the agency, but is not implemented for all evaluation procedures. The panel recommends to implement meta-evaluation procedures to all quality assurance schemes carried out by the agency, although there might be no need to do this annually.

The fact that AQU has linked several evaluation schemes in order to reduce the administrative burden for itself and for the higher education institutions is well appreciated among all stakeholders. E.g. the certification of internal quality assurance systems is connected to the programme evaluation framework. Faculties that are ex-post IQAs-certified are not required to present programme IQAs for review in procedures where this would normally be a requirement, i.e. ex-ante and ex-post accreditation. Furthermore, universities with an accredited teaching assessment handbook are not required to include academic staff in the ex-post IQAs certification procedure. Lastly, the combination of several programme accreditation procedures within the same faculty during one site visit helps to reduce the administrative burden.

The agency has put much effort into creating a unique structure for the suite of guides for the different evaluation procedures. Nevertheless, the panel noticed that there is still quite some diversity in the structure and content of the different assessment frameworks. Similar aspects are tackled, but often in a slightly different way. While procedures need to be fit for purpose, this might also be achieved by

creating one common core structure with standards and criteria for all programme assessment procedures. Additions or changes might then be made to adapt specific procedures where necessary.

Finally, the panel has been informed that the new law of AQU Catalunya merges the previous committees CLiC and CAR, and the CAR assumes all the functions done by CLiC, including the DOCENTIA programme. In this way, the agency has assured follow-up for the 2012 recommendation.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- A report about universities' implementation of recommendations should be included in the process of (re-)accreditation.
- There is an internal discussion at AQU about the frequency of monitoring, and the Panel encourages this debate. However, the matter should be determined promptly to preserve the confidence of universities in AQU operations.

Evidence

AQU Catalunya's procedures generally follow the structure such as required by this standard:

- All procedures have an internal self-assessment stage which has to take into account the aspects required in the external review. Exceptions to this are validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification, for which validation reports and modification reports must be submitted, respectively.
- An external review by an external review team that interviews the stakeholders.
- All procedures include the possibility of the presentation of supporting arguments during the reporting period and/or appeals before the Appeals Committee.
- All programme and institutional level reports are published on the EUC Reports web portal, with the exception of reports on certification procedures on international mobility and the review of foreign institutions that do not directly involve the higher education system in Catalonia and are published in the corresponding section of the AQU website.

- All procedures have a follow-up/monitoring stage, which is in many cases delegated to the institution under review. In procedures involving ex-ante accreditation, modification, monitoring, accreditation, international accreditation of quality and the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees, the role of AQU Catalunya comes to an end with the final report. In procedures involving ex post IQAs certification and accreditation of the teaching assessment handbooks, the external review reports are the basis on which the subject and/or function-specific committees make their considerations for accrediting and certifying a faculty/institution.

Those steps are described in detail in a guidebook per evaluation procedures. Those guidebooks are available on the agency's website. Additionally, internal procedures are developed in order to guarantee the professional, consistent and transparent implementation of those procedures.

Analysis

The panel confirms that each review process performed by AQU Catalunya is based in a framework that is reliable, publicized, and pre-defined. The evidence collected in the interviews with different stakeholders indicate that those review processes are regarded as useful and implemented consistently. The panel confirms that the main review processes include the four steps required by the ESG.

The assessment process of higher education programmes in Catalonia consists of four types of procedures. Before the start of a programme, ex-ante accreditation is required. This procedure is based on information provided by the institution and a paper-based evaluation of this application by the agency. Each institution is required to produce follow-up reports at least once every two years (bachelor and master) or every three years (doctoral degrees). The follow-up reports produced by the institutions are used as evidence in the following accreditation round. Through those approaches, the agency provided follow-up to the recommendations of the 2012 review. In the case of conditional accreditation, the institution is required to submit the follow-up report within two years to AQU Catalunya. This report is assessed externally and a report is published. If any programme wants to implement major changes, an external modification procedure is required. 4 to 6 years after the initial accreditation, an ex-post accreditation procedure is carried out. Ex-post accreditation is based on a self-assessment report, a site visit by peers and a published report. Overall, the panel assesses the VSMA-framework as a comprehensive framework for external quality assurance at programme level. While self-assessment, external assessment and published reports are clearly part of the VSMA-framework, external follow-up procedures by the agency are limited to programmes with conditional accreditation or modification procedures. The agency has chosen to reduce the administrative burden of the system for programmes which have received a positive external assessment by requiring institutions to prepare follow-up procedures without immediately assessing them externally. Although this approach may not be seen as a literal implementation of the requirements under this Standard, it does guarantee that institutions guarantee follow-up to each accreditation procedure. According to the panel, this has been a smart approach to keep the burden of the system in line with its added value, especially given the multiple processes handled by the Agency.

In addition to the quality assurance framework at programme level, the agency implements quality assurance procedures at the level of schools or departments, in order to complete the framework of external quality assurance procedures. The certification of IQAs and teaching assessment handbooks is the result of a long process including external evaluation of each step in the process, which could be seen as follow-up procedures. Overall, the external quality assurance system consists of a large set

of procedures which, as a whole, clearly guarantee that institutions are accountable for the quality of all dimensions of their work.

Finally, AQU Catalunya's external review procedures involving the international quality assurance and the quality assurance of institutions offering foreign degrees, include self-assessment, external review and published reports. The assessment of institutions offering foreign degrees is oriented on the initial granting of the right to offer such a programme and, therefore, does not include any follow-up upon a positive assessment. For international accreditation procedures, which are generally voluntary by nature, the full responsibility to request any kind of follow-up lies in the hands of the institution. In one of the two cases where AQU Catalunya has performed an assessment abroad, several follow-up measures have been implemented.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.

Panel conclusion: fully 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).

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- AQU should try to use international experts for site visits, when the accreditation procedure gets under way.

Evidence

AQU Catalunya includes external experts, individuals of recognised standing in the academic and professional field and students in external quality assurance, and takes into account the criteria of independence, objectivity and the absence of any conflict of interests.

External experts on the subject and function-specific committees and external review panels are nominated by the chairpersons of either the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) or the Research Assessment Commission (CAR), according to the corresponding functions.

The general profiles and prerequisites for experts are public and adapted according to review requirements envisaged in the preparation and planning of the project. The composition of the external review panels is stipulated in each review guide. Generally speaking, the panels consist of five members: two academics, one student, one professional and a secretary, who will also be a QA methodology specialist. For international procedures, AQU Catalunya often includes at least one panel member of the country of the institution under evaluation.

For the recruitment of panel member AQU Catalunya uses its pool of its experts and reviewers database. If there is an insufficient number of reviewers with the required profile, an active search is carried out on the Internet and through contacts provided by reviewers. AQU Catalunya has also

entered into collaboration agreements with professional bodies to facilitate the involvement of professionals in QA and review procedures. In the case of students, AQU Catalunya promotes training courses in QA procedures through the universities, which are a source of student recruitment, as well as AQU's Student Advisory Committee and relations with CEUCAT, the student council body for Catalan universities.

AQU Catalunya has two mechanisms in place to avoid any conflict of interests:

- External experts have to sign the *Commitment to comply with AQU Catalunya's principles of action, its values, Code of Ethics and Policy for quality and information security, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.
- Programmes and institutions are invited to inform the agency on any conflict of interest at the selection stage and prior to appointment of the panel.

All reviewers are required to participate in at least one training session prior to the start of a review process. AQU Catalunya also provides training materials for experts via the agency's website that are used as background and support material in the training sessions. AQU Catalunya produced explanatory videos on the VSMA Framework and the accreditation methodology and procedure.

Analysis

In all procedures under review, AQU Catalunya includes a student in the panel. Professionals also take part in all external review procedures aside from the evaluation of teaching assessment handbooks. The panel commends the agency for its consistent involvement of students and professionals in its quality assurance procedures.

The panel members the review panel interviewed are positive about the training and guidance they receive from AQU Catalunya. The panel, however, did not find evidence for a strong emphasis on the new reasoning behind the new ESG in the training provided to peer review experts. Some experts who are involved with AQU Catalunya for a longer time indicated that they only received training previous to their first remit. It might be relevant to invite them regularly for an update session. Indeed, the panel understood that some of the more experienced panel members did not participate recently in a training. In this way they might have missed the new elements which have been introduced upon the alignment of the procedures with the 2015 ESG.

The agency has procedures in place in order to make sure conflicts of interest are avoided. Nevertheless, the most effective way to increase the independence of experts is to involve experts from outside the own system. Since the previous ENQA peer review, the agency has worked hard to increase the number of academic experts from outside the Catalan higher education system. Although the panel understands this focus on academic experts from outside the system, also students and professionals from outside the own system might bring in relevant new ideas.

Table 3: Profile of panel members participating in external QA procedures in 2016

Profile	Catalonia	Rest of Spain	International	TOTAL
Academics	124	284	41	449
Professionals	99	6	1	106
Students	97	30	2	129
Total	320	320	44	684

Table 3 shows a strong presence of experts from other Spain regions. This contributes to the independence of the panels. As the approach to higher education is relatively similar in the different Spanish regions, the experts from other Spanish regions should not be considered equivalent to international experts. As the number of international experts remains quite low. Taking into account the recommendation provided by the 2012 ENQA review and the international ambition of both higher education institutions and the agency itself (as reflected in its strategic documents), it would be useful to define a target level of international participation in the different review procedures. Especially in the case of PhD programmes which often have a stronger international orientation than undergraduate programmes and in the case of institutional level reviews, the presence of international experts might be extremely relevant, both to bring in new ideas and to increase the level of independence in the external quality assurance system. Indeed, the Catalan higher education system is rather small and thus it is important to avoid any perception of lack of independence. While the agency sees the lack of available budgets as a major reason not to be able to attract more international members, the panel sees also two other barriers. A first issue is the use of Catalan in a limited number of procedures. Although the panel fully respects the choice to carry out some assessments in Catalan, this choice inherently reduces the possibilities to involve international experts. A second issue is the procedure where the selection of experts is primarily based on a database with self-nominated experts. Foreign experts who would be glad to join an AQU-panel are seldom aware of the procedures to self-nominate and, even if they are, do not nominate themselves. A more open search is, therefore, probably the only way to systematically involve the most relevant international experts in the agency's review panels. In the case of the selection of student-members, the agency might make use of the European QA Pool which has been established by the European Student Union ESU.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the agency for the systematic presence of not only students, but also representatives of the labour market in the review panels for accreditation procedures.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures.

- The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

AQU Catalunya creates a separate review guidebook for each type of external review procedure. A separate guidebook is available for international accreditation procedures and one for the accreditation of international programmes in Catalonia. Those guidebooks describe the procedures, dimensions/scope and criteria for review and are designed to provide one source document for the methodological requirements of both the internal self-evaluation and the external review teams. All guidebooks are published on the agency's website.

In the specific case of programme accreditation, a standard is set for each dimension, which in turn is divided into the components of the standard with a description given of the evidence to be provided and the indicators to be assessed. An explanation is also given of the way in which the reviewers assess compliance with each component of a standard according to four levels: accreditation on track to excellence, accreditation, accreditation with prescriptions and accreditation withheld, for which use is made of rubric charts to describe the assessment of each component.

The panels have a secretary who is responsible for standardising the application of the criteria across the corresponding panels to ensure coherent and consistent decision-making by the panels. The position of secretary is, wherever possible, filled by a member of the agency's technical staff.

In addition to the secretary, the subject or function-specific committees play a role in the consistent application of review procedures. Reports are not only revised by the external review panel, but also by the subject or function-specific committee. The external review panels are more aware of the actual delivery of each programme because they have carried out the site visit, whereas the perspective of the subject or function-specific committee is more overarching.

Analysis

During the site visit the review panel was able to confirm that the criteria and protocols are public and easily accessible to all stakeholders. There is also extensive consultation and dissemination before an evaluation starts, both to the institutions and to the reviewers involved in the procedures. The views expressed in the various meetings held with the panel indicated a positive disposition towards the consistency and fairness of the different review processes.

The secretary of each review panel has an important role in the consistent application of the evaluation frameworks. Based on feedback from the higher education institutions, the role of the secretary in guaranteeing consistency among reports is valued positively. Higher education

institutions commented that external secretaries (who are not a member of the AQU staff) did not attain the same level of uniformity and harmony in the application of the criteria. Furthermore, the review of all reports by the corresponding subject or function-specific committee guarantees a consistent approach within each area of study.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

The 2012 ENQA review recommendation on this standard:

- AQU should consider how to make reports as comprehensible as possible to non-experts.

Evidence

In each review guide, a specific section describes the structure of the reports, which specifies the characteristics, content and public nature of the report issued at the end of each review procedure. The reports include the following sections:

- Description of the context
- Description of the procedure used in the review
- Analysis based on the evaluation criteria
- Conclusions of the review
- Good practices demonstrated by the institution
- Recommendations and required follow-up actions

The agency always gives the institution under review the opportunity to comment on the preliminary report and to present any supporting arguments or to point out what it considers to be any errors of assessment in the report.

The agency ensures that all review reports are accessible to the academic community, external collaborators and other stakeholders. The agency implemented the recommendation of the 2012 ENQA review in order to make reports and their conclusions as comprehensive as possible for non-experts. All reports produced by AQU Catalunya on programmes delivered in Catalonia are published on the EUC Reports portal. Also, data is provided publicly on the EUC and WINDDAT portals (estudis.aqu.cat and winddat.aqu.cat). The agency develops and manages all these portals internally.

The only reports that are not published are the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful and that therefore will not be delivered or offered to prospective students in the future. There have been isolated cases of programmes for which a negative report was issued by AQU Catalunya and, following a successful administrative appeal to the Spanish Council of Universities, authorisation finally granted. In such cases, AQU Catalunya publishes the negative report.

Reports on the international accreditation of quality and the quality assurance of foreign institutions in Catalonia are published in the corresponding section on the AQU Catalunya website.

Analysis

AQU Catalunya has made significant efforts to develop consistent, structured, and helpful reports of its quality assurance activities. The panel has analysed several examples of those reports and has found that in general those were competently done and fulfilled those aims. Following the recommendation of the previous peer review, AQU Catalunya has clearly made efforts to make its reports as comprehensive as possible for non-experts such as students and potential students. The panel commends the agency for its consistent focus not only on substantiating the assessment outcomes, but also on good practices and recommendations for improvement.

Nearly all reports are published and easily accessible for all stakeholders. The only reports that are still not published are the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful and that therefore will not be delivered or offered to prospective students in the future. AQU Catalunya considers that publishing those reports will have a negative impact on the universities and society. The former could consider it a measure not oriented to improvement, because there will no follow-up actions associated, and the latter could be confused about information of non-existing degrees. In the opinion of the review panel, the publication of negative reports provides all stakeholders with a better insight in the quality of the preparatory work institutions do before they apply for ex-ante accreditation. It also shows the scrutiny with which the agency performs ex-ante procedures. It may, moreover, increase the confidence in positive outcomes, as it shows that not all proposals are accepted. Indeed, this ESG standard clearly requires the publication of all reports in order to fully comply with the ESG.

Individual reports are published in their original language on the *EUCReports* portal. Sometimes translations of those reports are also available. The agency has provides on its EUC platform in Catalan, Spanish and English the outcomes for each dimension assessed in the external site visit and accreditation of all recognised programmes delivered at higher education institutions in Catalonia. Additionally, the agency provides some quantitative data about the programmes. On the WINDDAT platform more quantitative data is available in a clear format. This platform targets mainly the institutions. Under ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis, the recent publication of overview reports for areas of study is already mentioned. In those reports data from different sources are brought together.

The panel recognises the agency's efforts to provide a lot of information public. This allows higher education institutions, students and society to learn more about the higher education offered in Catalonia. Nevertheless, due to the scattered nature of the data, it requires quite some efforts from the reader to analyse these data, e.g. a student who wants to make a choice between the different programmes offered in a specific area of study. The panel, therefore, recommends that AQU offers all available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data more easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders. It might be relevant to seek feedback from students, employers and other potential users of the information on their needs and to what extent the current structure fulfils those needs.

Taking into account the international ambition of the agency, the panel suggests the agency considers whether it would be relevant to, e.g., always provide a summary report in English or to perform full assessment procedures in English, especially in the case of PhD-programmes in which the international orientation is often very strong.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the agency for its consistent focus on substantiating the assessment outcomes, as well as on good practices and recommendations for improvement.

Panel recommendations

- 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.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

The agency has developed an internal procedure in order to handle complaints about review procedures by institutions, teaching staff or students in a consistent way. Complaints can be submitted via the complaints section on the website, corporate mailboxes and periodic meetings with the different stakeholders (in particular the Committee of Vice-Rectors responsible for quality and the Committee of QA technical units). Complaints are processed within one week of the receipt of the complaint, and all complaints are analysed once every three months by the Quality and Information Security Committee.

With the 2015 legislation, a formal appeals procedure has been added. The Appeals Committee is the body responsible for reviewing and ruling on appeals filed in relation to decisions by the agency's permanent and/or ad hoc bodies involved in quality assurance, certification and accreditation procedures. It is also responsible for issuing status reports on other proceedings by these bodies, where applicable to QA, certification and accreditation procedures.

The procedure for rulings on appeals filed in relation to decisions by the agency's bodies involved in quality assurance, certification and accreditation procedures establishes two types of arrangement:

- Rulings on appeals: the agency has its own procedure for consideration of appeals in relation to reviews and their outcomes, with individuals or institutions being notified of the appeal outcome. The Committee's ruling brings an appeal application process to a definitive close although an appeal for judicial review may be made before a disputes tribunal following the conclusion of an appeals process; and
- Review report: This forms part of an inter-administrative evaluation procedure, which can be either binding or discretionary for an administrative body, but is notified by a different public administration/authority. In such cases, the Appeals Committee would issue a review report, which then forms part of the consideration by a separate administrative body that makes a formal ruling, this is not part of the agency.

Analysis

In 2015, the agency has developed a complaints and an appeals procedure which allows institutions to raise issues about both the process and the outcomes of quality assurance procedures. In each guidebook, the appeals procedure is mentioned. During panel interviews with the stakeholders it was highlighted that higher education institutions appreciate the existing procedures. They also referred to the open communication with the agency which allows them to resolve many issues without the need to revert to a formal complaints procedure.

The Appeals Committee currently consists of a member of the Governing Board and two experts who are not active in any other body of the agency. All three members come from Catalonia and are active academics in the Catalonian higher education system, including the chair. Although the panel does not doubt the expertise, nor the professional integrity and approach of the members of the Appeals Committee, the panel considers that an all-Catalan composition of the Appeals Committee with only three members might create a perception of a lack of independence. It might be relevant to add some members from outside Catalonia, for example an independent chair not currently active in the system. This extension of membership seems also particularly relevant given that, under potential conflicts of interest, one or more members may not be able to participate in the deliberations of the committee if their own institution is involved, thus reducing the number of qualified members to one or two. These changes may strengthen the position and legitimacy of this body and of its current members.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

FOCUS ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

A priority ambition of AQU Catalunya is to move towards a less burdensome and more effective system of quality assurance within which institutions take more responsibility for their own quality. Such a shift requires strong and accountable governance within each higher education institution, allowing institutions to take responsibility for the quality of the education offered by the institution based on a well-developed internal quality assurance system. This includes a partial transfer of the responsibility for quality assurance from quality assurance agencies to higher education institutions. The panel suggests that AQU Catalunya develops a clear vision on this redistribution of roles between the external quality system administered by the agency and the internal quality of the higher education institutions.

SHIFT TO INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

In order to reduce the burden of external quality assurance, procedures at the level of individual staff and programmes are often replaced by enhancement led institutional level evaluations. AQU Catalunya has an ambition to make such a shift towards more institutional level evaluations. The panel learned, however, that in Spain institutional level evaluation is understood as evaluation at faculty, school or centre level. The recent Spanish legislation assigns 'institutional accreditation' to faculties, schools or centres which have obtained an accreditation of half of their programmes and an accreditation of their internal quality assurance system. AQU Catalunya welcomes those first steps which are taken in the Spanish legislation. The panel is, however, convinced that this legislation is only an initial step towards an approach which is commonly understood as institutional accreditation in an international context. Indeed, in an international context the concept of institutional evaluation is often understood as a system where universities are audited as a whole and as a consequence receive self-accrediting powers.

It might be useful for the agency to invest enough resources in not only implementing the new legislation, but also in developing, together with all stakeholders, a vision on the design of a fully-fledged system of institutional accreditation which would be fit for purpose for the Catalan, and the broader Spanish, context. Internationally, many other agencies are dealing with similar challenges and issues. The agency might, therefore, benefit from its broad international networks and exchange with other agencies on the choices they made. In line with the ambition to stay a leading agency in Catalonia, Spain and abroad, a clear and evidence based vision on this topic may result in a substantial impact on the further development of the legal framework both in Catalonia and Spain.

INTERNATIONAL AMBITIONS

AQU Catalunya has always been very active on the European and international level, with an active role in international networks such as ENQA, ECA, INQAAHE, and in many European projects. The agency has the ambition to further contribute to international quality assurance debates, to contribute to the internationalisation of the Catalan higher education system and to pursue an increase of international quality assurance processes it is involved in. The panel fully supports the international ambition of the agency.

Based on its discussions with all stakeholders, the panel concluded that there is no common understanding yet on the priorities within the field of internationalisation. The panel considers it important to create this common understanding of the priorities and to assign the necessary resources (both staff time and money) in order to implement the strategy on internationalisation.

The Catalan higher education institutions have clear international ambitions. AQU Catalunya wants to contribute to these ambitions. The panel welcomes the efforts which will be made in order to increase the number of international experts involved in AQU's quality assurance procedures. Those experts not only bring new ideas and international recognition, but they also reduce potential conflicts of interest in a small system such as the Catalan university system.

Furthermore, the agency is interested in carrying out quality assurance evaluations and activities outside Catalonia. The agency has not invested actively in this area in recent times because of the high workload associated with such activities. If the agency wants to increase its international profile further, it would be good to assign resources to this activity. In this case, it would also be good to clearly define the unique selling proposition the agency wants to propose to foreign institutions. Indeed, the international quality assurance market is relatively competitive.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

- The panel commends the whole team for the way it managed the heavy workload during the past years, with dedication and effectiveness while staying connected to developments in Europe.
- The panel commends the agency for its consistent involvement of students and professionals in its quality assurance procedures.
- The panel commends the agency for its consistent focus on substantiating the assessment outcomes, as well as on good practices and recommendations for improvement highlighted in reports.

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.

The ESGs where full compliance have been achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.2, 3.6 and 3.7.
- Part 2 – 2.3, 2.5, and 2.7.

The ESGs where substantial compliance have been achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.1, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5.
- Part 2 – 2.1, 2.2, 2.4 and 2.6

and the agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

In order to further optimize its work as a quality assurance, the panel would like to make some general and more detailed suggestions, which have already been signalled in the previous sections:

- The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation.
- 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 panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.
- The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term.

- The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.
- The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.
- 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.
- The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose.
- The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.
- The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures.
- The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG.
- 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 panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: 2012 AND 2017 EXTERNAL REVIEWS: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

ENQA Criterion/ESG	2012 review		2017 review	
	Level of compliance	Recommendations	Level of compliance	Recommendations
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (FORMERLY ESG 2.1)	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The form and demands of the progress report in the VSMA Framework should be more closely focussed on ESG Part 1. - In the arrangements that apply under the new law, AQU should continue to focus on the internal quality management of HEIs, which was a feature of the Audit programme. 	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends the agency to reflect 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.
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE (FORMERLY ESG 2.2 AND ESG 2.4)	Fully compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AQU should pay particular attention to the ways in which the functions now carried out by CLiC and CAR and within the "Docentia" programme may be brought more closely together. 	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose.
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES (FORMERLY ESG 2.6 AND 3.7)	Fully compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A report about universities' implementation of recommendations should be included in the process of (re-)accreditation. - There is an internal discussion at AQU about the frequency of monitoring, and the Panel encourages this debate. However the matter should be determined promptly to preserve the confidence of universities in AQU operations. 	Fully compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.
ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS (FORMERLY ESG 3.7)	Fully compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AQU should try to use international experts for site visits, when the accreditation procedure gets under way. 	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures. - The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG.
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES (FORMERLY ESG 2.3 AND 3.7)	Fully compliant		Fully compliant	

ESG 2.6 REPORTING (FORMERLY ESG 2.5)	Fully compliant	- AQU should consider how to make reports as comprehensible as possible to non-experts.	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS (FORMERLY ESG 2.7 AND 3.7 [GUIDELINE])	Fully compliant		Fully compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members.
3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.1, 3.3, AND 3.5)	Fully compliant		Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation.
3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS (FORMERLY ESG 3.2)	Fully compliant		Fully compliant	
3.3 INDEPENDENCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.6)	Substantially compliant		Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS (FORMERLY ESG 2.8)	Fully compliant		Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.
3.5 RESOURCES (FORMERLY ESG 3.4)	Fully compliant	- AQU should plan carefully for staffing demands when all four elements of the Framework (including Accreditation) come into play.	Substantially compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term. - The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and

				<p>preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.
3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT (FORMERLY ESG 3.8)	Fully compliant		Fully compliant	
3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES (FORMERLY ESG 3.8 [GUIDELINE])	Fully compliant		Fully compliant	

ANNEX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Sunday, 5 February 2017

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
	<p>Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I</p> <p>A pre-visit meeting with the agency contact person to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gemma Rauret, director of AQU Catalunya (1998-2006), AQU Catalunya resource person

Monday, 6 February 2017

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09:15-9:30	Review panel's private meeting	
9:30-10:15	Meeting with the president and the director of AQU Catalunya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Josep-Joan Moreso, president of AQU Catalunya ▪ Martí Casadesús, director of AQU Catalunya
10:15-10:30	Review panel's private discussion	--
10:30-11:20	Meeting with representatives of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Josep-Joan Moreso, president of the Governing Board of AQU Catalunya ▪ Joan Elias, rector of Universitat de Barcelona ▪ Margarita Arboix, rector of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ▪ Jaume Casals, rector of Universitat Pompeu Fabra ▪ Josep M. Garrell, rector of Universitat Ramon Llull
11:20-11:30	Review panel's private discussion	--
11:30-12:20	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs, Vice Rectors Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ferran Badia, vice-rector of Universitat de Lleida ▪ Carles Sigalés, vice-rector of Universitat Oberta de Catalunya ▪ Cristina Vaqué, vice-rector of Universitat de Vic-Universitat Central de Catalunya ▪ Jaume Armengou, vice-rector of Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
12:20-12:35	Review panel's private discussion	--
12:35-13:25	Meeting with representatives from the Senior Management Team (Internal Coordination Committee representatives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maria Giné, AQU's secretary ▪ Josep Manel Torres, head of Quality Assessment Department ▪ Esteve Arboix, head of Teaching and Research Department ▪ Carme Pérez, head of Administration Department ▪ David Gassiot, head of IT Department ▪ Jordi Escolar, legal advisor ▪ Núria Comet, project manager and head of internal quality assurance

13:25-14:30	Lunch (panel only)	--
14:30-15:30	Meeting with department/key body of the agency – CAIP and CAR representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Martí Casadesús, president of CAIP and president of the Special Committee for the Certification of IQAs Implementation ▪ Jordi Suriñach, member of CAIP and president of the specific committee for Social Sciences and Law ▪ Julià Cufí, member of CAIP and president of the specific committee for Sciences ▪ Gabriel Bugeda, member of CAR and Specific Committee for Teaching and Management Activity ▪ Rosa M. Martí, member of CAIP and president of the specific committee for Health Sciences
15:30-15:45	Review panel's private discussion	--
15:45-16:30	Meeting with department/key body of the agency – Appeals Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maria-Pau Ginebra, president of the Committee and member of the Governing Board ▪ Joan Gómez, member of the Committee
16:30-16:45	Review panel's private discussion	--
16:45-17:15	Meeting with representatives of international quality assurance (videoconference)*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ María Luisa Valdivia, Law Faculty Secretary (Universidad San Martín de Porres, Perú) ▪ Nancy Guzmán, director of the Bachelor and Degrees Office (Universidad San Martín de Porres, Perú) ▪ Erika Medrano, head of the Accreditation and Quality Office (Universidad San Martín de Porres, Perú)
17:15-20:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	--

* The meeting with representatives of the University San Martín de Porres, Peru was done in Spanish, with from the side of the panel only the chair and the secretary present. They summarized the inputs after the meeting to the other panel members.

Tuesday, 7 February 2017

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09:00-09:30	Review panel's private meeting	--
09:30-10:00	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maria Giné, member and secretary of the self-evaluation committee ▪ Josep E. Baños, member of the self-evaluation committee (and member of the Board of directors) ▪ Maria Pau Álvarez, member and secretary of the self-evaluation committee (and head of the QA Technical Unit of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

10:00-10:45	Meeting with the ministry representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Josep Pallarès, general director of Universities of Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Administration)
10:45-11:00	Review panel's private discussion	
11:00-11:50	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEI's- QA Technical Units Committee representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Olga Pujolràs, head of QA Technical Unit of Universitat de Barcelona ▪ Maria Pau Álvarez, head of QA Technical Unit of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ▪ Ricard de la Vega, member of QA Technical Unit of Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya ▪ Maria Taulats, head of QA Technical Unit of Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
11:50-12:05	Review panel's private discussion	--
12:05-12:55	Meeting with QA AQU staff representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Esther Huertas, project manager of programme & institutional external reviews ▪ Carme Edo, project manager project manager of programme & institutional external reviews ▪ Anna Prades, project manager project manager of programme & institutional external reviews ▪ Eva Benito, project manager project manager of programme & International external reviews ▪ Albert Basart, project manager of programme & institutional external reviews ▪ Esther Adot, project manager of programme & institutional external reviews ▪ Concepción Herruzo, project manager of programme external reviews
12:55-13:05	Review panel's private discussion	--
13:05-14:00	Lunch (panel only)	--
14:00-14:50	Meeting with representatives from the reviewer's pool- CAE- Experts of AQU Catalunya (academics and professionals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Andreu Olesti, academic of Universitat de Barcelona (Law) ▪ Ángel Ortiz, academic of Universitat Politècnica de Valencia (Engineering) ▪ Jaume Valls, academic of Universitat de Barcelona (Economy) ▪ César Valdés, professional- Dow Chemical Ibérica
14:50-15:00	Review panel's private discussion	--
15:00-15:45	Meeting with students (Student advisory committee and students involved in external review processes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ferran Español, member of the Student advisory committee and Fine Arts student-Universitat de Barcelona ▪ Albert Gili, member of the Student advisory and Economy student-Universitat Pompeu Fabra ▪ Alejandro Gómez, Geography student-Universitat de Barcelona

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sandra Nieto, PhD student of Economy -Universitat de Barcelona
15:50-16:00	Review panel's private discussion	--
16:00-16:45	Meeting with stakeholders, such as employer representatives, local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carles Martín, president of Itscool Association ▪ Josep Roma, Health Department of Catalan Administration (Generalitat de Catalunya) ▪ Ignasi López, "la Caixa" Banking Foundation ▪ Miquel Martínez, coordinator at the Improvement and Innovation in Teaching Training Programme ▪ Anna Marín, collaborator at the Improvement and Innovation in Teaching Training Programme
16:45-20:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparations for day III and provisional conclusions	--

Wednesday, 8 February 2017

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09:30-10:30	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	--
10:30-11:15	Meeting with the director to clarify any pending issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Martí Casadesús, director
11:15-12:15	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	--
12:15-13:00	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Josep-Joan Moreso, president of AQU Catalunya ▪ Martí Casadesús, director of AQU Catalunya ▪ Gemma Rauret, agency resource person ▪ Maria Giné, AQU's secretary ▪ Josep Manel Torres, head of Quality Assessment Department ▪ Esteve Arboix, head of Teaching and Research Department ▪ Carme Pérez, head of Administration Department ▪ David Gassiot, head of IT Department ▪ Jordi Escolar, legal advisor ▪ Núria Comet, project manager and head of internal quality assurance
13:00-14:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and lunch (panel only)	--

ANNEX 3: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

May 2016

1. Background and Context

AQU Catalunya is a public organisation that was founded in 1996 with the mission to conduct external reviews and analyse quality in the universities to safeguard the public interest, as well as to encourage enhancement in the sector and to inform society of the results of external review processes. While its main activities focus on Catalonia, the Agency is also active at international level.

OWNERSHIP

The origins of AQU Catalunya lie in the consortium, Agency for the Quality of the University System in Catalonia, which was established on 29 October 1996. In 2003, the consortium became the present-day agency, until on 8 July 2015 when the Parliament of Catalonia approved the AQU Catalunya Act (*Llei 15/2015, de 21 de juliol*). New legislation was necessary for AQU Catalunya, above all to comply with the recommendations of the ESG external international review of AQU Catalunya carried out in 2007.

The agency is an independent body, and it is funded by the government of Catalonia. The Board of the agency is comprised of representatives from different higher education institutions, the government of Catalonia and independent members (academics, students, and society representatives).

AGENCY QA ACTIVITIES

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, AQU Catalunya, is the main instrument for the promotion and assurance of quality in the Catalan higher education system. The purpose of AQU Catalunya is the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality in the sphere of the universities and higher education centres of Catalonia.

METHODOLOGY USED

AQU Catalunya reviews Catalan university degree courses, faculties and schools, services and institutions. Since 2011, the agency has implemented the Framework for the validation (ex-ante assessment), monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised awards, the purpose of which is the life-long quality assurance and continuous enhancement of degree courses.

Since 2003, AQU has carried out the pre-selection assessment of academic staff contracted at the public universities in Catalonia; since 2006, the agency has assessed the individual merits in teaching, research and management of teaching and research staff at Catalan universities within the framework of additional remuneration for academic staff.

AQU Catalunya has been a full member of ENQA since 2000 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

AQU Catalunya has been registered on EQAR since 2008 and is applying for renewal.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AQU Catalunya fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of AQU Catalunya should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support AQU Catalunya application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

2.1 Activities of AQU Catalunya within the scope of the ESG

In order for AQU Catalunya to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities AQU Catalunya that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of AQU Catalunya have to be addressed in the external review:

1. Institutional level external reviews
2. Programme level external review
3. Review of institutions offering foreign degrees
4. International quality assurance by AQU Catalunya

Furthermore the self-assessment report and the external review report should discuss AQU's arrangements for the recognition of EQA activities of other quality assurance agencies and how AQU ensures ESG compliance in the recognition of quality labels.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by AQU Catalunya including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AQU Catalunya;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews 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. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member 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 AQU Catalunya with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards AQU Catalunya review.

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

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

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AQU Catalunya fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny 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 whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case 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 reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

AQU Catalunya will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AQU Catalunya at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AQU Catalunya in arriving in Barcelona, Spain.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and AQU Catalunya.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to AQU Catalunya for comment on factual accuracy. If AQU Catalunya chooses to provide a 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 Catalunya, finalise the document and submit it to AQU Catalunya and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

AQU Catalunya is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which AQU Catalunya expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

AQU Catalunya will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. AQU Catalunya commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by AQU Catalunya. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AQU Catalunya has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to AQU Catalunya and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by AQU Catalunya, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AQU Catalunya may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

AQU Catalunya shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, AQU Catalunya will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to AQU Catalunya if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	June 2016
Appointment of review panel members	November/December 2016
Self-assessment completed	December 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	January 2017

Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	January/February 2017
Briefing of review panel members	Early February 2017
Review panel site visit	Late February/Early March 2017
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Early April 2017
Draft of evaluation report to AQU Catalunya	Mid-April 2017
Statement of AQU Catalunya to review panel if necessary	Early May 2017
Submission of final report to ENQA	By Mid-May 2017
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AQU Catalunya	June 2017
Publication of the report	June/July 2017

ANNEX 4: GLOSSARY

ANECA	Spanish National Agency for Quality Assurance
AQU	Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
CAIP	Institutional and Programme Review Commission
CAR	Research Assessment Commission
CLiC	AQU Commission that dealt with tenure-track and collaborating teaching staff
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
INQAHEE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
QA	quality assurance
REACU	Spanish Network of Agencies of Higher Education's Quality Assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
UAB	Autonomous University of Barcelona
UAO	Abal Oliba University
UB	University of Barcelona
UdG	University of Girona
UdL	University of Lleida
UIC	International University of Catalonia
UOC	Open University of Catalonia
UPC	Polytechnic University of Barcelona
UPF	Pompeu Fabra University
URL	Ramon Llull University
URV	Rovira i Virgili University
UVic-UCC	University of Vic/Central University of Catalonia
VSMA	Validation (ex-ante accreditation), Monitoring (Seguimiento), Modification and Accreditation

ANNEX 5. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQU CATALUNYA BEFORE THE SITE VISIT

- AQU Catalunya Self-Assessment Report 2017
- AQU's web platforms www.aqu.cat, estudis.aqu.cat and winddat.aqu.cat

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQU CATALUNYA DURING THE SITE VISIT ON PAPER

- AQU Catalunya Strategic Plan 2015-2018
- AQU Catalunya 2015 Summary annual report
- Memòria d'activitats d'AQU Catalunya 2015
- Guía para la elaboración y verificación de las propuestas de titulaciones universitarias de grado y máster. // Guide to the formulation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) of proposals for Bachelor and Master's programmes
- Guía para la elaboración y la verificación de las propuestas de programas oficiales de doctorado. // Guide to the formulation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) of proposals for recognised doctoral programmes
- Guía para el seguimiento de ls titulaciones oficiales de grado y máster. // Guide to the monitoring of recognised Bachelor and Master's degree programmes
- Guía para el seguimiento de los programas oficiales de doctorado // Guide to the monitoring of recognised doctoral programmes
- Guía para el seguimiento de los títulos de enseñanzas artísticas superiores // Guide to the monitoring of programmes in the Performing and Visual Arts
- Guide to the accreditation of recognised Bachelor and Master's degree programmes
- Evidencias e indicadores recomendados para la acreditación de grados y másteres // Recommended evidence and indicators for the accreditation of Bachelor and Master's programmes
- Guia per a l'obtenció dun "label" per a graus I masters, integrate n el procés d'acreditació d'AQU Catalunya // Guide to the award of quality labels for Bachelor and Master's programmes, as part of the AQU accreditation process
- Guide to the assessment of additional dimensions in the accreditation of recognised Bachelor and Master's programmes
- Guide to the certification of IQAs implementation
- Guía de evaluación del diseño del Sistema de garantía interna de la calidad de las enseñanzas artísticas superiores // Guide to the assessment of IQAs design of programmes in the Performing and Visual Arts
- Guia per a l'acreditació del procés d'avaluació docent contingut en els manuals d'avaluació docent // Guide to the accreditation of the teaching assessment procedure given in the teaching assessment handbooks. Internal self-assessment stage
- Guía para la acreditación del proceso de evaluación docente contenido en los manuals de evaluación docente // Guide to the accreditation of the teaching assessment procedure given in the teaching assessment handbooks. External review stage
- Guide to university research assessment at department-level
- Guide to international quality assurance of higher education. A tool for international academic mobility
- Guide to the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia
- S.04.01. Improvement: nonconformities and corrective actions
- OP.01 Assessment-accreditation of degree programmes and institutions
- S.02 Management of experts

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQU CATALUNYA DURING THE SITE VISIT ON REQUEST OF THE REVIEW PANEL

- AQU's professional development plan 2016
- Preparatory documents for the meeting of the Governing Board of 18/07/2016
- Report "Internationalisation of Higher Education in Catalonia: Assessing the additional dimension on internationalisation in HE study programmes accredited and delivered in Catalonia, February 2016



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya), undertaken in 2017.



2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW