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Bern, 26 February 2018

Subject: letter in addition to Membership decision of 21 June 2017

Dear Mr. Casadesús Fa,

On 14 September 2017, AQU Catalunya sent a letter to ENQA following the receipt of the final external review report in June 2017, expressing a number of critical reflections on the review. After a consideration of the feedback, the ENQA Board decided to adapt the review report scrutiny procedure, in order to make it more transparent and to ensure greater consistency between reviews. In this regard, it was decided that should the Review Committee's judgments deviate from those of the Review Panel, in light of the evidence provided in the report, and should the Board agree with the Review Committee, the Board should explicitly articulate and reason their difference of opinion from that of the panel in the decision letter. This applies in both situations – if the Board considers some of the panel's judgements being overly strict or overly lenient in light of the evidence brought forward.

However, the ENQA Board does not endorse the judgements of the review panel for each ESG standard, as the panel's function is to provide an expert opinion to support the Board in their decision making on the overall ESG compliance. As such, the experts do not take a decision but provide expert opinions to underpin a decision on the overall ESG compliance, and only the decision is appealable. From this follows that appealing against the review panels' judgements is not possible, as this would undermine the review panels' role as experts.

In the light of the revision of the process, the ENQA Board has analysed the scrutiny of AQU Catalunya's review report in more detail and provides here the articulation regarding the specific standards of the ESG, where a difference of opinion from that of the panel exists:

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The Board agrees with the Review Committee that the panel's judgement of the ESG 3.4 is overly strict. The review report confirms that AQU Catalunya has produced several thematic analyses and that their content meets the expectations of the standard: *“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.”* The Board finds the panel's recommendation to structurally embed

this practice in the agency's work programme more as a suggestion for further improvement than a compliance related issue.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The Board supports the Review Committee's opinion that the Panel's judgement of the ESG 2.2 is overly strict, and that the recommendation regarding a more pro-active stance in the development of a clear vision on where the external quality assurance system in Catalonia and Spain should progress towards, is supplementary. The report confirms that the objectives of the individual agency's procedures are clearly defined and it also acknowledges the limited possibilities for the agency to influence the decisions (to move towards an institutional accreditation system).

In addition to the points evidently arising from the review scrutiny, the ENQA Board would like to express its view on the following standards:

ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The Board acknowledges that AQU Catalunya is working in a specific national setup and legal regulatory environment, thus some of the flagged issues under the ESG 3.1 are not directly in the agency's power to influence or change. The Review Panel points out that the regulatory framework, in which AQU Catalunya operates, includes activities that are in other countries often taken up by higher education institutions, such as the evaluation of the performance of teaching staff. The Board is of the opinion that the Panel's recommendation related to this is more of a suggestion for further improvement than a compliance related issue. The Board notes that the differentiation between the internal and external quality assurance and thereafter the sharing of responsibilities between the higher education institutions and agencies varies across the countries. In the Board's view, this is not directly linked with the agency's compliance with the ESG and thus the Board finds the Panel's judgement of this standard being overly strict.

ESG 3.3 Independence

As regards independence, the Board would like to acknowledge AQU Catalunya's improvement in this area since the last review. The Board is pleased to see that the modifications of the legislation in 2015 have clearly contributed to the agency's organisational independence especially as regards the appointment of staff members.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

The Board would like to acknowledge the considerable improvement of AQU Catalunya in reporting. This is clearly visible from the evidence provided in the review report. However, the Board is of the opinion that all reports resulting from the agency's quality assurance activities should be published, including the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful. This is firstly to ensure a full transparency of the agency's activities. Secondly, even though those programmes will not be offered, the Board believes that the

publishing of these reports can contribute to further development, as other institutions might learn from the shortcomings identified in the negative ex-ante reports.

Please take note that this is an ex-post analysis based on the already existing material of the external review and no new information was collected for this purpose. This letter will be published on the ENQA website together with the final review report as well as with the Board's initial decision on Membership.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund

President