

Substantive Change Report
by the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
(AQU Catalunya)

Register Committee

Ref. C18

Ver. 1.0

Date 2017-05-02

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Decision of:	2 May 2017
Report received on:	14/02/2017
Agency registered since:	05/12/2008
Last external review report:	July 2012
Registered until:	31/07/2017
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Josep Grifoll
Attachments:	1. Substantive Change Report

1. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 14 February 2017.
2. The Register Committee thanks AQU Catalunya for the comprehensive information provided on the full range of its activities. The Committee, however, underlined that only information on the new (or changed) activities, i.e. those not addressed in the 2012 external review or substantially changed since then, was required within the context of a Substantive Change Report. The Committee therefore limited its review and analysis strictly to the information on international quality assurance (item 3 in the report) and quality assurance of foreign institutions (item 4).
3. The Register Committee took note of the process for **quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia** (item 4). The Committee welcomed the information provided as to how the ESG 2015 are addressed.
4. While the Register Committee noted that the guide provides for the presence of a student on all panels, it noted that this was not the case for one of the procedures according to the report published by AQU Catalunya.
5. The Register Committee expects that AQU Catalunya ensures compliance with its own rules and the ESG for all future procedures.

6. The Register Committee took note of the **process for international quality assurance** (item 3).
7. The Register Committee noted that a number of international reports published by AQU Catalunya predate the relevant Guide of October 2016 and do not necessarily comply with its provisions. The Register Committee expects that all international quality assurance activities launched henceforth will comply with the provisions of the Guide.
8. An earlier English version of AQU Catalunya's Guide stated that "As a general rule, the student shall belong to the same HEI as the institution assessed." (p. 8) Given that ESG standard 2.4, however, stipulates that external quality assurance "should be carried out by groups of external experts", the Register Committee initially requested AQU Catalunya to amend its processes accordingly.
9. In response to the Register Committee's initial decision AQU Catalunya clarified that the English version contained a translation error and that it should state that "the student shall belong to the same Higher Education System as the institution assessed".
10. The Register Committee took note of evidence provided by AQU Catalunya that it had corrected the published Guide and that its actual practice also followed the intended wording. **The Committee thus concluded that standard 2.4 has been complied with.**

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Subject: Substantive Change Report: AQU - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
From: "secretariat@aqu.cat" <form_engine@fs22.formsite.com>
Date: 14/02/2017 11:47
To: substantive-changes@eqar.eu

Reference #	10877645
Status	Complete
Login Username	AQU Catalunya
Login Email	mgine@aqu.cat
Agency #1 *	AQU - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
Expiry date #1 *	31/07/2017
Contact #1 *	Maria Giné Soca
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Other organisations? *	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed? *	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed? *	No
C.i. Are there new types of activities? *	Yes
C.ii. Are there changes in existing activities? *	No
C.iii. Have some or all existing activities been discontinued? *	No
Description new/changed *	<p>Substantive change report, requested by EQAR in the Application no. A44 of 06/04/2016 of Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Renewal of Registration.</p> <p>The External Quality Assurance Activities of AQU Catalunya within the scope of the ESG are:</p>

1. Programme level external reviews: http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/mvsma/index_en.html

2. Institutional level external reviews, that includes:

2.1. Certification of internal quality assurance systems: http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/certificaciosgiq/index_en.html

2.2. Teaching assessment handbooks: http://www.aqu.cat/professorat/merits_docencia/mad_en.html

2.3. The quality assurance of research at department level: http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/avaluacio_departaments_en.html

3. International quality assurance by AQU: http://www.aqu.cat/internacional/acreditacio_internacional_en.html

4. Quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia: http://www.aqu.cat/internacional/centres_estrangers_en.html

All the key aspects of these activities are included in the SAR 2017 of AQU Catalunya: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_17112869_1.pdf

The activities number 1, 2.1., 2.2., 3 and 4 are existing activities. 3 and 4 were not considered in the external review of 2012, but they are included in the scope of the external review 2017.

In the attached document there is the description of the compliance with ESG

File #1

[Substantive report January 2017 v2.pdf \(1520k\)](#)

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COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

**SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE REPORT, REQUESTED BY EQAR IN THE
APPLICATION NO. A44 OF 06/04/2016 OF CONFIRMATION OF
ELIGIBILITY: APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL OF REGISTRATION**

1. INTRODUCCION

In accordance with the terms of reference for the external review coordinated by ENQA and revised by EQAR, the four external QA activities of AQU Catalunya described below are submitted for review of compliance with the ESG:

1. Programme level external reviews
2. Institutional level external reviews
3. International quality assurance by AQU
4. Institutions offering foreign degrees

The importance given to these programmes varies markedly due to the fact that the main focus of AQU Catalunya's activities is higher education quality assurance in Catalonia. It is for this reason that most resources are allocated mainly to activity 1 and also 2, whereas far fewer resources are allocated to activities 3 and .4 as they are undertaken on demand.

A description of the Agency's external review activities is given below.

1.1. Programme level external reviews

Includes:

[1.1.1. Validation \(*ex-ante* accreditation\)](#)

[1.1.2. Monitoring](#)

[1.1.3. Modification](#)

[1.1.4. Accreditation](#)

1.2. Institutional-level external reviews

Includes:

[1.2.1. Ex-post IQAs certification](#)

[1.2.2. Teaching assessment handbooks](#)

[1.2.3. The quality assurance of research at department level](#)

[1.3. International quality assurance](#)

[1.4. Quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia](#)

2. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)¹

ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

AQU Catalunya's VSMA Framework (2016) clearly defines the implementation of internal quality management systems (IQAs) in institutions as being one of the key factors in quality assurance in universities and higher education institutions in Catalonia. More specifically, it lays down that:

“The four main elements that the VSMA Framework (2016) revolves around are:

- *Certification of quality assurance systems: The development of a system of certification for quality assurance systems that are being implemented in institutions should be the cornerstone for simplifying all procedures associated with the VSMA. This should lead to progress towards quality assurance at institutional level, in accordance with the line of work at international level. The aspiration is for universities in the Catalan system to form part of the category of self-accredited/self-accrediting institutions. (...)*”

As such, and in the practical application of these principles laid down in the VSMA Framework, AQU Catalunya takes into account the efficacy of the internal quality assurance system (IQAs) in the following aspects:

- The Agency promotes and recognises IQAs certification in that it is indispensable for the institutional accreditation of an institution. This means that the individual accreditation of an institution's programmes no longer makes sense in a system where it is only the IQAs that require certification, together with half of the programmes.
- IQAs certification is one of the essential requirements for the use of 'pathway 2' in validation (ex-ante accreditation) defined in the VSMA Framework, according to which the universities may directly handle this procedure.
- IQAs implementation is promoted through the inclusion in the VSMA guidebooks (Guides to the validation, modification, monitoring and accreditation of recognised programmes) of a specific section for the review of IQAs design and/or implementation (where appropriate) in each institution.

All of these actions aim at the promotion and recognition of, as well as giving impetus to, IQAs implementation, as well as helping to greatly reduce the Agency's volume of QA processes through greater trust being placed in the universities' internal QA systems.

One should also bear in mind that all external QA review processes organised by AQU Catalunya are EHEA-inspired, they reflect national and international recommendations and they take into account the effectiveness of the internal QA procedures described in Part 1 of the ESG, where

¹ The analysis of compliance with all the ESG applies to the four external QA activities. So, in the majority of the cases the same procedure is applied to all the processes. AQU Catalunya describes the procedure individually when it is different to the rest of the QA activities.

applicable. The following table shows the standards in Part 1 of the ESG that are covered by the Agency's review guides:

Table 1. Standards in Part 1 of the ESG as set out in AQU Catalunya's QA guidebooks

Guidebook	ESG	1.1.	1.2.	1.3.	1.4.	1.5.	1.6.	1.7.	1.8.	1.9.	1.10.
Validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification		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
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 External Guide		D,E External Guide		D External Guide	D External Guide	A, B, C External Guide	C, E External Guide	A, B External Guide	A, B, F External Guide
Quality assurance of research at department level		3.1		3.1		3.1	3.1			4 / 5	5
Foreign institutions		3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	4 / 5	5
Quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4 / 5	5

1.1: Policy for quality assurance; 1.2: Design and approval of programmes; 1.3: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification; 1.5: Teaching staff; 1.6: Learning

resources and student support; 1.7: Information management; 1.8: Public information; 1.9: On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes; 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance.

As can be seen from the table above, only two guidebooks and two of the standards in Part 1 of the ESG are not covered, and these are not subject to review according to the aim and purpose of each of the two guidebooks.

ESG Standard 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The methodologies designed by the Agency are aligned with the purpose and objectives of its review activities and provide professional guidance to people who participate in internal and external QA procedures, in such a way that findings and decisions are the outcome of a sound and coherent method of work. The methodology is produced prior to the start of any review procedure.

Technical staff at AQU Catalunya design, produce and implement the methodology on the basis of the purpose and objectives to be achieved, external benchmarks and standards (Spain and international), with the involvement of the institutions under review and the stakeholder groups. The proposed methodology is revised internally and subsequently referred to the advisory committees for consultation, as follows:

- Committee of vice-rectors responsible for quality.
A follow-up of the review methodologies is scheduled on a periodic basis, in general once every three months, with new methodologies also being proposed.
- Committee of QA technical units
Meetings are held on a periodic basis for the technical follow-up of the review methodologies, with the heads of QA technical units from all the universities.
- Depending on the body responsible for its approval, either the Institutional and Programme Review Commission (CAIP) or the Research Assessment Commission (CAR) is consulted.
These two commissions have the powers to modify and approve new methodologies, according to the functions assigned to them. Approval is undertaken fully independently although with consideration, where applicable, of any aspects noted by the advisory committees described above. The guidebooks are also consulted in the respective subject and/or function-specific committees.
- External review panels: opinions gathered during review processes are also incorporated in the revision and development of new methodologies.

In addition:

- Generally speaking, consultation is extended to other groups when considered to be necessary. For example, various different meetings were held recently with all the directors of doctoral schools in the Catalan university system in reference to the design of the monitoring guide for doctoral studies.
- 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).
- In other cases, stages for instrument design have been established prior to actual implementation, for example, as in the case of the Teaching assessment handbooks and Ex-post IQAs certification projects.
- In the case of the Guide to accreditation, there was a public consultation of teachers and students.

The current QA guidebooks by AQU Catalunya that are used and applied in external review procedures are as follows:

Table 2. Current QA guidebooks by AQU Catalunya

Scope	Methodology
<u>Validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification</u>	Guide to the formulation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) of proposals for Bachelor and Master's programmes Guide to the formulation and validation (ex-ante accreditation) of proposals for recognised doctoral programmes
<u>Monitoring</u>	Guide to the monitoring of recognised Bachelor and Master's degree programmes Guide to the monitoring of recognised doctoral programmes Guide to the monitoring of programmes in the Performing and Visual Arts
<u>Accreditation</u>	Guide to the accreditation of recognised Bachelor and Master's degree programmes Recommended evidence and indicators for the accreditation of Bachelor and Master's programmes 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
<u>Internal quality assurance system (IQAs)</u>	Guide to ex-post IQAs certification Guide to the assessment of IQAs design of programmes in the Performing and Visual Arts
<u>Teaching assessment handbooks</u>	Guide to the accreditation of the teaching assessment procedure given in the teaching assessment handbooks. Internal self-assessment stage Guide to the accreditation of the teaching assessment procedure given in the teaching assessment handbooks. External review stage
<u>Quality assurance of university research at department-level</u>	Guide to the quality assurance of university research at department-level
<u>International accreditation of quality</u>	International quality assurance of higher education. A tool for international academic mobility
<u>Quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia</u>	Guide to the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia

The purpose and objectives of the guides being currently used, which are set out in the first section of each guidebook (section 1.1), are briefly as follows:

Table 3. Purpose and objectives of current review guidebooks

Guides	Purpose and objectives
Validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification	To facilitate the drawing up by programme coordinators/academic managers of proposals for new recognised degree courses and their modification, for internal revision by the institution itself, and for independent external review by AQU Catalunya.
Monitoring	To offer an instrument that can be used by institutions to analyse the delivery of degree courses, diagnose and draw up enhancement proposals and corrective measures for any deviation identified between the programme design and normal delivery, and enhancement proposals identified during accreditation. Monitoring is also intended to be a source of evidence for accreditation.
Accreditation	<p>Based on an external site visit, to check that a programme is being delivered according to planned in the validation (ex-ante accreditation) stage and accordingly renew its continuity within the time-frame prescribed by law (4 years in the case of Master's programmes and 6 years in the case of Bachelor's and doctoral programmes).</p> <p>This includes the optional assessment of additional dimensions (career development, employability and recruitment; internationalisation; and research-teaching linkages) and the corresponding label-related review.</p> <p>AQU Catalunya also provides support to universities in Catalonia wishing to get a subject-specific quality label, with the procedure being integrated as much as possible into the framework of accreditation, given compliance to <u>specific characteristics</u>.</p>
Internal quality assurance system (IQAs)	To certify that an internal quality assurance system has been introduced and is being implemented in a faculty/institution that is responsible for programme delivery, and that the IQAs is fit for purpose for programme quality assurance.
Teaching assessment handbooks	To evaluate and review the functioning and application of QA procedures for teaching in each university in accordance with the criteria set by AQU Catalunya, on the basis of the principles of transparency, stakeholder satisfaction and accountability.
Quality assurance of research at department level	<p>To assess research being carried out in university departments in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serve an instrument for the improvement of research policies. ▪ Determine the type of research being conducted in the universities. ▪ Identify the most dynamic areas and environments for research.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote processes and change in line with the research objectives of the university ▪ Identify possible synergies between research being conducted in different departments of the same university.
International accreditation of quality	Certify institutions that can demonstrate academic rigour in accordance with European standards and that, at international level, are reliable and trustworthy partner institutions for cooperation and academic mobility, in particular with institutions in the university system in Catalonia.
Quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia	Provide the required information on programme quality to the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia for authorisation and subsequent introduction and delivery in Catalonia.

Once a methodology has been officially approved, it 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 has been organised, as in the case of the [accreditation of recognised degree programmes](#), which was attended by more than 300 registered participants. AQU Catalunya therefore makes absolutely sure, prior to starting a review process, that all stakeholders, external reviewers and those being reviewed understand the purpose, the objectives and the methodology that is to be applied.

In the specific case of the Guide to Programme Accreditation and given its impact on the university system as a whole, AQU Catalunya produced a video with the guide content.

Video 1. The Guide to programme accreditation



AQU Catalunya takes very much into account the volume of work and cost involved in reviews for institutions. It is for this reason that their opinions are taken into consideration when reviews are undertaken and their internal time-frames are respected, insofar as the regulations permit this. Nevertheless, in order to reduce the workload and associated costs, the following are carried out:

- Meta-evaluation sessions with all those involved to perfect the processes, specify improvements and find solutions to optimise both economic and human resources, for

example, the discussion session for the accreditation procedure with the QA technical units (2015).

- Improvements to, and the promotion of, WINDDAT as a support instrument for review processes in Catalonia. More than 70% of the data (indicators) required in programme accreditation are currently accessible in the same format and totally validated from this platform.
- Support in establishing and facilitating indicators for research, as in the case of the quality assurance of university research at department level through the use of tools for bibliometric analyses. This means that it is not necessary for institutions to allocate resources to providing these data to departments that are undergoing review.
- System-wide joint coordination of data/indicator collection, thereby avoiding the need for each university to obtain them individually. For example, the surveys on graduate employment outcomes and satisfaction which, aside from facilitating procedures such as accreditation, help the universities in decision making. AQU Catalunya bears the cost of the coordination, management and execution of the entire process, which means an important saving for the universities. The graduate employment outcome surveys are co-funded by the social councils of the public universities and the boards of trustees of the private universities in Catalonia.

In relation to the need for processes to support institutions in quality enhancement, it should be noted that Law 1/2003-LUC laid down that the quality assurance and promotion of Catalan universities shall be incumbent on the universities themselves and on the corresponding government department for universities and defines the Agency as the primary instrument for the promotion and assurance of quality. In this regard, and in reference to QA processes, it should be noted that:

- At the end of each QA/review procedure or period, the Agency regularly undertakes a series of meta-evaluation processes to analyse how things worked, which also includes the level of satisfaction of the stakeholders who have participated in the review (from meetings, focus groups and satisfaction surveys), the results and outcomes as well as enhancement proposals for prospective reviews in the future. AQU Catalunya has developed meta-evaluation processes for almost all of its review programmes. In the meta-evaluation, AQU Catalunya provides support to institutions and facilitates processes that assist them in implementing continuous quality enhancement.
- AQU Catalunya provides support through the ex-post IQAs certification programme and the teaching assessment handbooks and reinforces the role of the universities as being primarily responsible for the quality assurance of study programmes and the assessment of their teaching staff. With the approval of the new VSMA Framework (2016) these instruments take on a special significance in that institutions with an ex post IQAs certification can choose to become self-accredited/self-accrediting institutions i.e. they themselves can validate and accredit the programmes they deliver under the supervision of AQU Catalunya, which gives them much greater flexibility.
- In parallel to this, AQU Catalunya has participated in projects such as IMPALA (Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes of Higher Education Approach), the aim of which is to develop a methodology to determine the effects of external quality

assurance. Projects like this indirectly serve to underpin the support given by AQU Catalunya to the higher education system in Catalonia.

With regard to the need for processes that enable institutions to demonstrate improvements and enhancements made, it should be noted that:

- All processes designed by AQU Catalunya allow institutions to demonstrate the improvements made, more specifically in the monitoring stage, which takes place at least once every two years for programmes in Catalonia. Another example is the teaching assessment handbooks, where institutions have the opportunity once every year of updating improvements made to their handbooks as a consequence of the accreditation reports.
- Review reports set out the improvements made by institutions, together with good practices in a specific section of the report.

Lastly, and with regard to the information provided on outcomes and monitoring (follow-up):

- All of the guides have a special section (section 4) on the “Review outcomes”, which details the content of the final reports, the quality labels that have been awarded and the effects of the review. Review reports that have been issued are public and clearly specify the outcome of the review, together with the aspects that need to be improved for follow-up.
- At the same time, all guides contain section 5, on “Follow-up/monitoring and continuous enhancement”, which sets out the procedure for the follow-up of the review. Both this and the previous section are new compared to earlier editions of the guides, in which follow-up was dealt with in a less harmonious way.

ESG Standard 2.3. Implementing processes

All review and assessment procedures by AQU Catalunya comply with the ESG (2015) and are based on a self-assessment, a subsequent external assessment by a panel of experts, the publication of a final report and a follow-up procedure to evaluate any proposed enhancement actions. The review and assessment procedures are set out and published in each review guide. More specifically:

Table 4. Layout of QA and review procedures at AQU Catalunya

	Validation	Monitoring	Modification	Accreditation	IQAs	TAH	UR-DL	International accreditation	Foreign institutions
Self-assessment	VR	•	MR	•	•	•	•	•	•
External review	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Supporting arguments	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Publication of reports	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Quality labels and certificates	•			•	•		•	•	
Follow-up	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Appeals	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

IQAs: IQAs certification; TAH: Teaching assessment handbooks; UR-DL: Assessment of university research at department-level; VR: validation report (ex-ante accreditation); MR: modification report.

- 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 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.

- The majority of the Agency's external QA activities have associated quality labels and certificates.
- All procedures have a follow-up/monitoring stage, which has its own section in all the guidebooks (section 5 of each guide).

Given that the VSMA Framework is the Agency's main external review procedure, the QA/review guides and other relevant sources are published for all VSMA review procedures (see following table):

Table 5. Other published sources for external review procedures

Scope	Other sources
<p><u>Validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification</u></p>	<p><u>Guidelines for reducing the intensity of review in validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification</u></p> <p><u>Guidelines for the validation (ex-ante accreditation) of Bachelor-level studies with a lower credit load</u></p> <p><u>Processes for communicating and/or reviewing modifications made to Bachelor-level and Master's programmes</u></p> <p><u>Processes for communicating and/or reviewing modifications made to doctoral/PhD programmes</u></p>
<p><u>Monitoring</u></p>	<p><u>Guidelines for the monitoring of recognised Bachelor and Master's programmes</u></p>
<p><u>Accreditation</u></p>	<p><u>Guidelines for the accreditation of recognised Bachelor and Master's programmes</u></p> <p><u>Criteria for dealing with quality labels obtained directly by institutions</u></p> <p><u>Deadlines and procedure for programme accreditation applications</u></p> <p><u>Recommended evidence and indicators for the accreditation of Bachelor and Master's programmes</u></p>

All reviews are planned according to IQA procedure OP01. Review process/accreditation of programmes and institutions².

The review procedure is specified in section 2 of each guide: "[Review organisation and planning](#)".

AQU Catalunya's technical staff are responsible for ensuring that the corresponding methodology is applied consistently in all institutions participating in the same review project. In the case of VSMA projects, a technical expert is assigned with handling the projects within

² Document available to external reviewers from AQU Catalunya at the time of carrying out the site visit.

one university in order to better harmonise the process within the institution. Technical staff meet once a week for internal coordination to analyse and coordinate the consistent development of projects in and across the higher education system. All other review projects (IQAs certification³, teaching assessment handbooks, the assessment of research in university departments, international accreditation of quality, quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees in Catalonia), due to their scope, are assigned a technical expert for each project, who is then responsible for controlling the process in an integrated way.

Each institution starts the self-assessment process with a clear idea who the AQU technical expert is and who will guide them through the entire process and resolve any queries that the institution may have.

In parallel to this, AQU's technical staff prepare the external review process. Firstly, the members of the external review panel are nominated, except for procedures involving validation (ex-ante accreditation), monitoring and modification, for which it is the subject and/or function-specific committee that carries out the review⁴; the timetable and programme for the site visit are agreed, which will include the corresponding stakeholders to be interviewed, although the following are proposed: teaching staff, students and graduates, administrative and services staff, employers, programme/institution coordinators, the management team and the QA technical team.

The external review team is responsible for producing an evidence-based site visit report that includes recommendations for enhancement to be introduced by the programme/institution being reviewed. The external review panel also validates an enhancement plan at the end of the entire process, with specific actions to be implemented and followed up.

In procedures involving validation (ex-ante accreditation), modification, monitoring, accreditation, assessment of research in university departments, 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 validation (ex-ante accreditation), modification and accreditation, it is the Spanish Universities Council (Consejo de Universidades) that completes the validation/accreditation of a programme or authorises its modification. In the case of the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees, it is the corresponding Government of Catalonia department with jurisdiction over the universities that authorises the establishment of the institution in Catalonia.

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.

³ It is envisaged that, when the volume is larger, the coordination of this programme will be assigned to individual AQU technicians according to university/universities.

⁴ In the case of accreditation, it is the subject and/or function-specific committees that issue the accreditation report, whereas the external review panels draw up and issue the external review report.

In every case where a review by AQU Catalunya is favourable, the corresponding quality label is issued.

The decisions of the committees and panels may be appealed before the Appeals Committee for review and ruling.

All procedures, as stipulated in the QA/review guides (section 5 of all guides), provide for a follow-up stage within the period set for each procedure. In external review procedures involving the international quality assurance and the quality assurance of foreign institutions offering foreign degrees, which in the context of AQU Catalunya have so far been insignificant, it has been detected that there is still clearly definite room for improvement regarding follow-up. For this reason, the Agency has worked internally on revising the corresponding review guides to reinforce the systematic follow-up of programmes and institutions for which AQU Catalunya has implemented external review procedures.

Given that the most important procedure in the VSMA Framework is accreditation, the Agency produced a video on how the framework works:

Video 2. How the accreditation site visit works



ESG Standard 2.4. Peer-review experts

In accordance with the ESG (2015), AQU Catalunya includes external experts, individuals of recognised standing in academic and professional field (optional) 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 [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 section 2 of the review guides: "Review organisation and planning". Generally speaking, the external review panels consist of five members: two academics, one student, one professional and a secretary, who will also be a QA methodology specialist.

All external review panels constituted by AQU Catalunya therefore include students, aside from those set up to assess university research at department level that, given the purpose and objectives of such reviews, do not require a student member on the team.

Professionals also take part in all external review procedures aside from those where, given the purpose and objectives of such reviews, they are not required, which include review procedures involving the teaching assessment handbooks and the assessment of university research in department level.

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

- For external experts, through their acceptance of 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* available on the [reviewers database extranet](#) that reviewers receive together with a review assignment. The Commitment document makes express reference to ESG standard and guidelines 3.3. on reviewers.
- For programmes/institutions that are being reviewed so they can state if there is any conflict of interest at the selection stage and prior to appointment. A list of experts who have participated on external review panels is published every year on the AQU website.

For recruitment, use is first made of [AQU Catalunya's pool of experts and the 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 numerous [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 CEUCAT⁵, the student council body for Catalan universities.

In order to participate in QA and review processes, all new experts are required to fill out a CV form on the extranet database. Experts are then selected on the basis of the profile required for each review procedure.

Once the experts have been selected, they are contacted and informed of their nomination. If they accept:

- For the subject and function-specific committees, appointment is for 4 years and on nomination their CVs are published on the Agency's website.
- In the case of the external review panels, their participation is proposed to the institution/programme being reviewed so they can state if there is any conflict of interest and, if not, they are appointed. A list of experts who have participated on external review panels is published every year on the AQU website.

Following appointment, they are provided with access to the experts' extranet in order to fill out the forms for handling and managing their personal data and invoicing. They are also required 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* provided on the reviewers extranet.

When the experts have accepted the Commitment with the Code of Ethics and have validated all their data, they are given access to the relevant platforms and invited to a training session in preparation for an actual review procedure. All reviewers are made to participate in at least one training session prior to the start of the 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 and, in the case of accreditation, the explanatory videos produced by AQU Catalunya on the VSMA Framework, and the accreditation methodology and procedure. The training session has the same structure for all the QA processes: the presentation (contextualization) of the project, the procedure of evaluation, the methodology, and, if it is necessary, some practical case studies. The training session takes from 3 hours (ex-post IQAs certification, teaching assessment handbooks, the quality assurance of research at Department level, international quality assurance and quality assurance of foreign institutions offering degrees in Catalonia) to 5 hours (programme level external reviews in Catalonia).

The Agency manages the participation of experts in all review procedures and, on completion of the activity, they are paid their fees and, where applicable, their resignation is processed. They are also asked to give their opinions by way of a satisfaction survey and an assessment made of their role in the review procedure according to different aspects (technical knowledge, expertise, reliability, fulfilment of responsibilities, preparation of meetings, attitude, etc.) in order to upgrade the wealth of information that exists on AQU Catalunya's reviewers database.

⁵ www.ceucat.cat

This assessment at the end of the entire process is fundamental for the optimum upkeep of the experts database.

The management of external experts is handled in accordance with IQA procedure S02: Management of experts⁶.

The external quality assurance procedures set out in this self-assessment report currently involve the following participants:

Table 6. Profile of those currently participating in external QA procedures

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

Students and professionals who form part of external review panels and the subject and function-specific committees are normally Catalan, whereas the academics come from outside the Catalan higher education system. As can be seen from the following table, over the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of members from outside the Catalan higher education system in external review procedures coordinated by AQU Catalunya:

Table 7. Involvement of experts in external quality assurance procedures

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 ⁷
Members from institutions in Catalonia	9	5	46	92	40
Members from elsewhere in Spain	18	11	41	112	61
International members	1	0	1	27	11
Total	28	16	88	231	112

Although budgetary constraints have limited the participation of international experts, AQU Catalunya has the intention, with the support of the Government of Catalonia, of increasing their presence in areas where this is possible and appropriate, especially because institutions have expressed the need in certain cases for experts with more relevant profiles.

⁶ Document available to external reviewers from AQU Catalunya at the time of carrying out the site visit.

⁷ As of 10 October 2016.



Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
de Catalunya

Optimised management of the eligibility of experts is one of the objectives of AQU Catalunya. In this regard, a project was started in 2008 to define all of the procedures connected with their management: recruitment, selection, training, management, assessment and retention. AQU Catalunya has been supporting the development of software since 2014 to facilitate and improve these procedures.

ESG Standard 2.5. Criteria for outcomes

All external review procedures by AQU Catalunya, whether they include the possibility of formal decisions as a result of the external review procedure or not, have corresponding review guidebooks that describe the procedures, dimensions/scope and criteria for review. These criteria are given in section 3 (Dimensions and standards) of each guide. It is important to point out that the guidebooks are designed to provide one source document for the methodological requirements of both the internal self-evaluation and the external review teams. This means that the person who is reviewing and the person being reviewed both have the same information on the scope of the review and the criteria being used.

In the specific case of the site visit for programme accreditation, a standard is set for each dimension, which in turn is divided into the components parts of the standard with a description given of the evidence to be provided and the indicators to be assessed⁸. An explanation is also given of the way in which the reviewers assess compliance with each component part 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 part. This ensures maximum consistency between the review and the final report.

In order to ensure consistency in the application of the review outcomes, AQU Catalunya organises training sessions for experts taking part in committees and panels in order to provide a uniform overview of the purpose and objectives of the review, together with standard guidelines for the application of the review methodology and criteria. Practical case studies are worked on in these training sessions.

The Agency's QA commissions have a secretary who, in addition to having his/her own functions, is responsible for standardising the application of the criteria across the corresponding QA commissions to ensure the highest levels of coherent and consistent decision-making by the commissions. The position of secretary is, wherever possible, filled by a member of the Agency's technical staff. When this is not possible due to the volume of visits, the position is filled by an external member who receives a more in-depth and intense training in order to be able to undertake the site visits in a uniform and harmonious way. Institutions have however commented that there is greater uniformity and harmony in the application of the criteria when staff from AQU Catalunya participate in the site visits for accreditation, due to their experience and more comprehensive understanding of the process.

One aspect worth pointing out, in reference to accreditation, in which work is being done to simplify the process and raise the levels of coherence and consistency is that the preliminary reports for the site visit and accreditation are referred to the institution at the same time. This means that the reports have to be revised in parallel by the external review panel and the subject or function-specific committee, bearing in mind that the external review panels are more aware of the actual delivery of each programme because they have carried out the site visit whereas

⁸ In the case of accreditation, indicators for standards 1, 4 and 6 are facilitated by WINDDAT.

the perspective of the subject or function-specific committee is more comprehensive and greatly enhances the review. This twofold review can overly extend the time frame for the issuance of the reports. Work has been done on the interrelationship between the external review panels and the subject or function-specific committees to reduce delays to a minimum and thereby increase consistency as much as possible.

The fact that there have been very few appeals is an indicator that the criteria are explicit, known and applied coherently. Since AQU's Appeals Committee was set up, seven (7) appeals have been filed in relation to review procedures out of a potential total number of more than 500. Subsequent to its analysis of these reports by independent external experts, the Appeals Committee has so far ratified all of the review procedures and decisions by the subject and/or function-specific committees.

ESG Standard 2.6. Reporting

Content of the reports

The reports produced by AQU Catalunya are comprehensive and clear, even though some of them of necessity relate to administrative processes.

There is a specific section in each review guide on the “final report”, which specifies the characteristics, content and public nature of the report issued at the end of each review procedure. These reports include the following sections:

- Description of the context
- Description of the procedure used in the review
- Tests, analyses and outcomes are given
- Conclusions of the review
- Good practices demonstrated by the institution
- Follow-up actions (Included under section 5 of the guides: Follow-up and continuous improvement)
- The procedure for submitting supporting arguments (included under section 3 of the guides: Review organisation and planning)

On the basis of this content, AQU Catalunya's team of technical experts is responsible for ensuring that the language and style used in the reports is appropriate and standardised. In the case of the site visit and accreditation reports, the use of rubric charts makes for the easier use of standard language in all reports.

As explained in each guide (section 3 of the guides; Review organisation and planning), before the final report is issued, a preparatory report is always issued to give the institution the opportunity of presenting any supporting arguments and pointing out what it considers to be any errors of assessment in the reports.

Public availability of the reports

AQU Catalunya ensures that all review reports are accessible to the academic community, external collaborators and the stakeholders. All reports produced by AQU Catalunya on programmes delivered in Catalonia are public.

The only reports that are not published are the validation (ex-ante accreditation) reports on programmes that have not been introduced 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 validation report.

EUC portal: The EUC portal, which was launched in response to a recommendation in the previous external review (2012) on ways of presenting reports in a more comprehensible way to non-experts, offers easy-to-understand information on the quality of all recognised degree programmes offered in Catalonia. The EUC portal provides a summary in three different languages (Catalan, Spanish and English) of the outcomes for each dimension assessed in the



external site visit and accreditation of all recognised programmes delivered at higher education institutions in Catalonia.

EUCReports: External review reports from programme and institutional reviews by AQU Catalunya in Catalonia are published on the EUC Reports portal, and programme reports can also be accessed via the EUC portal, which is linked to EUC Reports. Searches on the EUC Reports portal can be carried out according to either university, faculty, degree course or review programme.

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.

ESG Standard 2.7. Complaints and appeals

The complaints process

Any complaint about review procedures undertaken by institutions, teaching staff or students are handled according to IQA procedure S.04.01 - Improvement: Complaints and corrective measures⁹. Systems for dealing with complaints include, among others, 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.

The appeals process

One of the developments of Law 15/2015 was the establishment of AQU Catalunya's Appeals Committee¹⁰ in fulfilment of one of the commitments made by AQU Catalunya following the external review in 2012.

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 Appeals Committee consists of:

- a) One member from the Governing Board from among the people stipulated in article 7.2.d, Law 15/ 2015, who chairs the Committee and is appointed for the same period of time as he/she is appointed as a member of the Governing Board.
- b) Two or more persons, to be determined by the Governing Board, of either an academic, scientific or professional standing and with technical expertise, who is not on any other AQU Catalunya body, and who is appointed for a once-renewable period of four years, renewable by halves every two years.

The inaugural meeting of the Appeals Committee was held on 2 December 2015, in which the committee's rules of internal procedure were established and endorsed, together with the procedure 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. The setting up and functioning of the Committee, which has met six times all together, has clearly resulted in improvements to AQU Catalunya's external review procedures.

The rules of internal procedure regulate the Committee's composition; its functions; the regularity of its meetings; the performance of its duties and the replacement of the chairperson and the committee members; the functions of the chairperson and the committee secretary;

⁹ Document available to external reviewers from AQU Catalunya at the time of carrying out the site visit.

¹⁰ Article 16.

the convening of meetings at least twice a year, which may be in person, online or mixed; committee meeting agreements and proceedings, which once approved are published on the Agency's website, in compliance with the regulations on transparency, personal data protection and AQU Catalunya review, certification and accreditation procedures; and reform of the rules.

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:

1. Rulings on appeals: the Agency has its own procedure for rulings on appeals filed in relation to reviews and their outcomes, with individuals or institutions being notified of the appeal ruling. 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; and
2. Review report: This forms part of an inter-administrative evaluation procedure, which can be either binding or discretionary for an administrative body, but are notified by a different public administration/authority. In such cases, the Appeals Committee would issue a review report, which then forms part of a ruling by a separate administrative body that is not part of the Agency.

For each type of arrangement there is an established procedure, which forms part of AQU Catalunya's review, certification and accreditation procedures that are set out in the review methodologies. Special mention is made in all the review guides to section 2 (Review organisation and planning), which refers to the appeals process.

The Appeals Committee has to periodically issue reports and other informative documents on the outcome of appeals and review reports issued, classified according to the type of call for applications, fields of knowledge, etc. In this regard, the Committee can request non-binding reports as deemed appropriate from external advisers appointed by the Committee chairperson. It may also refer reports and observations on review, certification and accreditation procedures to AQU Catalunya's QA commissions and governing bodies in accordance with the supporting arguments presented and decisions by the Committee in order to improve the aforementioned procedures.

3. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)

ESG Standard 3.4. Thematic analysis

The Agency implements this standard in three areas: reports resulting from review procedures; sector reports and dissemination actions.

Reports resulting from QA procedures

AQU Catalunya produces meta-evaluation reports that describe and analyse the functioning and conclusions its main external QA activities, including: validation (ex-ante accreditation) and modification of undergraduate and Master's programmes, the monitoring of undergraduate and Master's programmes and the accreditation de undergraduate and Master's programmes¹¹, for use in and by the university system in Catalonia for improvement and enhancement purposes.

It also produces and disseminates reports on specific programmes, such as the *Inclusive university-system review report. Master's degree programmes in teaching training for compulsory secondary education and upper secondary education (baccalaureate), vocational training and language teaching*, which was referred to the coordinators of this Master's programme in all the universities where it is run and the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia for decisions regarding the approach of the Master's programme and planning. Another example is 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*, produced from the information gathered during the validation (ex-ante accreditation) and accreditation of programmes in Design and referred to the Government of Catalonia's Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Economy and Knowledge.

With the same objective, and on completion of the accreditation of all the courses in Catalonia, the inclusive review report on undergraduate programmes in teaching training for compulsory secondary education and upper secondary education (baccalaureate), vocational training and language teaching is nearing completion, and the production of three inclusive reports is anticipated for 2017 to provide a more accurate perspective of specific aspects of the higher education system in Catalonia, namely the undergraduate Bachelor's degree in Law and Master's degrees in Law and Engineering.

In addition, and with the clear aim of dynamically and efficiently providing information for analysis, the Agency uses WINDDAT, a webpage that provides indicators on teaching for programme delivery and analysis, which facilitates all information required by university authorities for analysing programme delivery. WINDDAT enables different types of comparison

¹¹ In preparation.

to be made between programmes and universities in Catalonia by providing information that is much more dynamic than a customary report. During this period, the Agency adapted WINDDAT to programme accreditation ([see example](#)) so that all published indicators are aligned with those used during an accreditation process. WINDDAT provides indicators that are essential for programme coordinators in carrying out monitoring and preparing for accreditation, identifying trends and making comparisons with other programmes in the higher education system in Catalonia. WINDDAT provides more than 40 types of indicator on each programme, organised according to accreditation, admission and enrolment, students, teaching, teaching staff, academic outcomes, mobility and graduate employment outcomes. The fact that WINDDAT is now more closely integrated into QA and review processes has led to an upsurge in its use.

In parallel to this, the Agency regularly reports the aggregate results of programme accreditation to the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia for use in new programming proposals and also monitors the activities undertaken and the results obtained, which are periodically presented to the [advisory committees](#) and [QA commissions](#) in their meetings, a process that concludes with the production of the [Annual Report](#), which is referred to the Governing Board for its approval and then published and posted on the AQU Catalunya website.

Open access to accreditation results is available on the [EUC web portal \(University Studies in Catalonia\)](#) which gives the rating of programmes according to a series of different dimensions. This website is available in three languages (Catalan, Spanish and English) and allows for the easy comparison of degree programmes at national and international level.

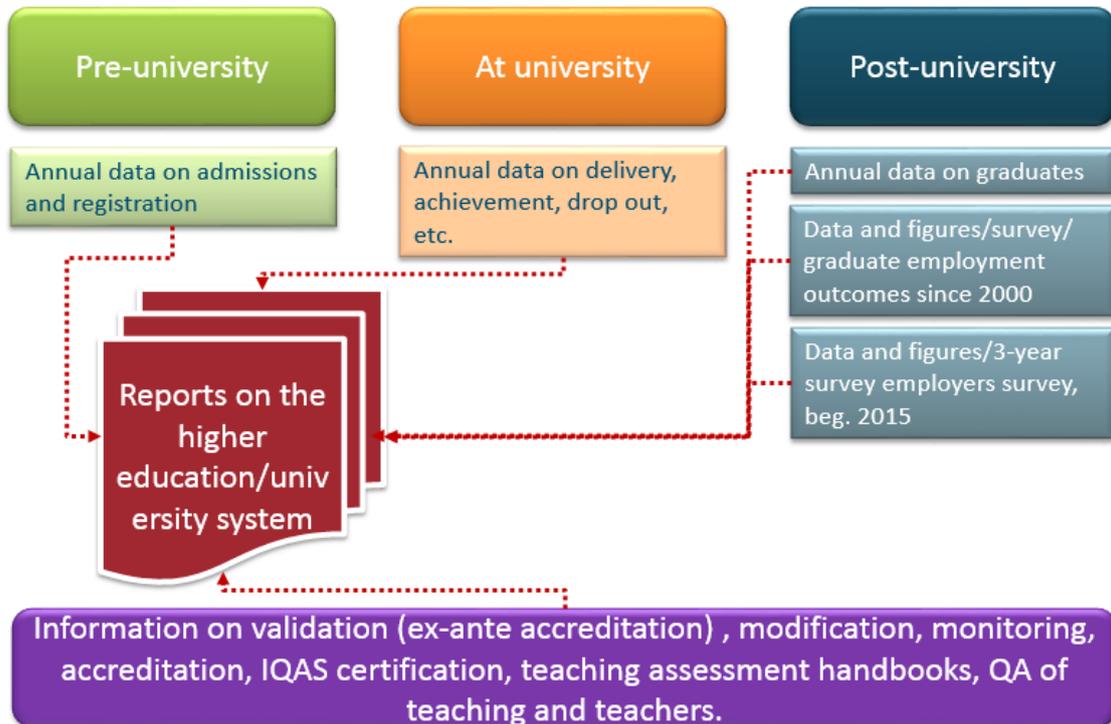
In the draft [Action Plan 2017](#)¹², there are also plans to draw up a personalised report on each university to the rector and vice-rectors responsible for quality and teaching staff, with the data and figures that the Agency has available on the quality assurance of programmes and teaching staff compared to the mean for Catalonia, for the purposes of reflection and decision-making in each individual university.

Sector reports

AQU Catalunya has a robust and reliable information system that allows it to produce reports that include both the results of its external QA activities and other sources of information, such as data obtained from the graduate employment outcomes survey, the employers survey that it coordinates, and others. The following figure shows the different sources of information that the Agency uses in producing reports:

¹² Activity 20.

Figure 1. System of available information for producing reports



Over the same period, the Agency produced and carried out the fifth survey of graduate employment outcomes and promoted the first survey of employers and their perceptions regarding the employability of recent graduates, which together have so far resulted in nineteen different research studies in different universities in Catalonia (see following table) and numerous reports produced on demand, for example, the cross-referencing of data on university supply and demand with employment outcomes, for any given university, programme, etc. Some studies have compared the results with national benchmarks (for example, the graduate employment outcomes surveys of Galicia and the Basque Country, and the quarterly survey of the working population).

With regard to graduate employment outcomes surveys, the Agency is preparing the sixth survey, which will be carried out between January and March 2017 and the second survey of employers and their perceptions regarding the employability of recent graduates. 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 the three-year study.

Work is also under way to incorporate the data obtained from the Bachelor's graduate satisfaction surveys gathered annually since 2015 into these studies when the level of data reliability is high enough.

Table 8. Sector reports published between 2012-2016

Title	Year
SUPORT programme [Catalan]	2012
University and employment in Catalonia 2011 [Catalan]	2012
Gender and graduate labour market outcomes [Catalan]	2012
How to produce, tutor and assess a Master's dissertation [Catalan]	2013
The employment outcomes of doctoral degree holders from universities in Catalonia	2014
Universities and employment in Catalonia 2014	2014
The employment outcomes of Master's degree holders from universities in Catalonia	2015
Employers' perceptions of the employability and skills of recent graduates in Catalonia	2015
The employability and skills of new teachers. The opinion of preschool, primary and secondary education institutions [Catalan]	2015
The employers survey: a qualitative analysis. The opinion of school principals regarding the training of preschool and primary school teachers [Catalan]	2015
The employers survey: a qualitative analysis. The opinion of school principals regarding the training of secondary school teachers [Catalan]	2015
The opinions of finance companies, insurance companies and real estate companies regarding graduates in Economics, Business Administration and Management, and Business Studies [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of firms and businesses regarding the preparation and training of production engineers [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of firms and businesses regarding graduates in Communication [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of employers regarding graduates in Medicine [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of firms and businesses regarding architects and civil engineers [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of firms and businesses regarding communication engineers [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of consulting firms regarding graduates in Economics, Business Administration and Management, and Business Studies [Catalan]	2016
The opinions of employers regarding graduates in Nursing [Catalan]	2016
Effects of the crisis on graduate employment outcomes [Catalan]	2016
Equity in access and the occupational integration of university graduates:	2016

<p>Chapter 1. Trends in the occupational integration of graduates: from expansion to on-going crisis [Catalan]</p> <p>Chapter 2. The effects of studying and working at the same time on academic results and employment outcomes [Catalan]</p> <p>Chapter 3. The social composition of access to university [Catalan]</p> <p>Chapter 4. The transition to university [Catalan]</p>	
<p>The adaptation of programmes and qualifications in Catalonia according to EHEA guidelines (pending publication) [Spanish]</p>	2017
<p>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, June 2016 (pending publication)</p>	

Several of these reports have been translated into Spanish and English to enhance the internationalisation of knowledge generated in the higher education system in Catalonia and facilitate comparability between different countries.

Dissemination actions

AQU Catalunya organised the following workshops, seminars and discussion forums dealing mainly with the higher education system in Catalonia, with an average attendance of 150 participants, in which the results and findings of activities organised by the Agency were presented:

Table 9. Seminars and workshops organised by AQU Catalunya (2012-2016)

Title	YEAR
Workshop on the meta-evaluation of the validation (ex-ante accreditation), monitoring and modification of recognised programmes	2012
The social impact of the universities at a time of crisis	2012
Reaccreditation of the teaching assessment handbooks used in public universities in Catalonia	2013
Indicators of graduate employment outcomes: an instrument for HEI marketing (attracting students) and careers guidance	2013
The accreditation of recognised programmes of study	2014

<u>Presentation of the results and findings of the fifth survey of graduate employment outcomes</u>	2014
<u>Quality, an instrument for the internationalisation of degree programmes at Catalan universities</u>	2014
<u>What needs to be improved in doctoral training?</u>	2014
<u>Employers' opinions regarding university graduates: results, findings and challenges</u>	2015
<u>Programme accreditation as a tool for internationalisation</u>	2015
<u>How can teacher training be improved and enhanced?</u>	2015
<u>The impact of the crisis on graduates</u>	2016
<u>Impact evaluation of quality management in higher education. A Contribution to Sustainable Quality Development of the Knowledge Society</u>	2016
<u>What is the purpose of external quality assurance?</u>	2016
How to improve nursing skills and training (planned)	2017
How to improve doctors' skills and training (planned)	2017

The Agency also presented its QA activities and analytical studies on different subjects as a way of contributing to reflection on and the enhancement of QA policies and procedures in institutional, national and international contexts:

Table 10. Presentations of AQU Catalunya's activities (2013-2016)

Scope	2013	2014	2015	2016
Catalonia-related	11	12	20	13
Spain-related	4	5	7	1
International-related	11	24	19	12
TOTAL	26	41	46	26

ESG Standard 3.6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

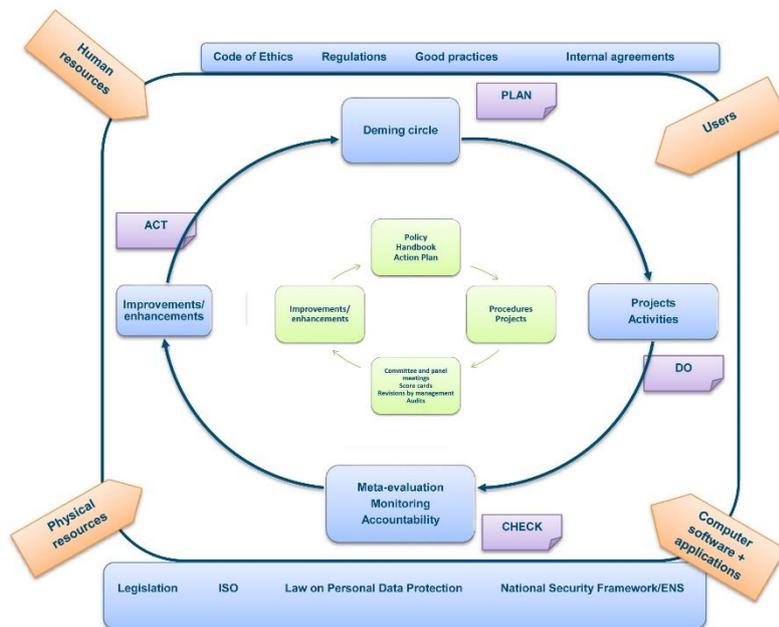
The Agency's quality and information security management system is based on AQU Catalunya's quality and information security policy, which is available on the Agency's website, and comprises:

- All the processes described in the AQU process map.
- All information systems involved in the provision of services including personal data protection.
- All users of AQU Catalunya's information systems.

Internal quality assurance was introduced when the Agency was founded and it has been externally certified since 2000 when it became the first QA agency in Spain to be ISO 9001-certified. AQU Catalunya's certification is renewed on an annual basis. In 2012, the Agency started a process to incorporate information security into its management system, and in 2015 the Agency successfully completed external certification with ISO standard 27001.

The IQA facilitates and promotes improvement and enhancement through Deming's PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, which is followed in the Agency's day-to-day activities as well as its IQA.

Figure 2. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle at AQU Catalunya



The following table summarises the evidence of the regular application of AQU Catalunya's quality and information security management system (IQA):

Table 11. Summary of the evidence of the application of AQU Catalunya's IQA

Evidence:	
PLAN	Strategic Plan Annual Action Plan Planning of projects Policies
DO	Implementation of the following Plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal procedures-instructions, which define the activities to be carried out, the responsibilities and the outputs ▪ Review guides ▪ Regulations ▪ Reports/register
CHECK	Monitoring of the Agency's activities: coordination meetings, strategic meetings, project monitoring meetings Quality and Information Security Management Committee Indicator monitoring and analysis Meta-evaluation (annual accounts of the Agency's different sections) Meta-evaluation of projects (annual accounts of the Agency's different sections) Follow-up of incidents and internal and external enhancement proposals (intranet portal/webpage mailbox/corporate mail) Internal audits External audits
ACT	The improvement Plan for each of the Agency's different sections Periodic revision of the review guides and procedures

In order to advance systematic improvement in the effectiveness of the IQA, a system revision is undertaken every year by the Management, through the Quality and Information Security Committee, based on the following:

- A revision of the Quality and Information Security Policy and the Quality and Information Security Handbook.
- The state of the actions proposed in previous revisions.
- Analysis of any changes in the external and internal activity of AQU Catalunya that may be important for the IQA.
- Information on the outcomes of AQU Catalunya's activity, bearing in mind audit outcomes; users' complaints and petitions; corrective measures; the users' opinions; and indicator results, trends and defined objectives.

- Enhancement proposals.
- Business impact analysis.
- Risk treatment plans and information security risk assessment.

The 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 the Management System Review are referred to the Quality and Information Security Committee and 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.

In relation to the guidelines under this standard:

- Training ensures 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's quality and information security management system (IQA) 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. For more information on the stakeholders' opinions, see [section 11](#). 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, in the section on work environment, 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 quality and information security management system stipulates the communications to be maintained by the Agency with institutions and individuals that undergo a review procedure, as well as for each sphere of action. AQU Catalunya also incorporates the different stakeholder groups in its [governing](#) and [advisory bodies](#). The Governing Board monitors the Agency's activity in terms of its efficiency and efficacy and deals with the Agency's strategic and institutional matters. In the case of the advisory bodies, including the Committee of Vice-Rectors and the QA technical units, meetings deal more with operational aspects and coordination.
- AQU Catalunya 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. AQU Catalunya also



provides support to institutions in the university system in Catalonia for QA procedures that do not depend directly on AQU Catalunya. For example, in the case of programmes applying for a [sector quality label](#), AQU Catalunya manages the corresponding review and fully integrates it into the QA procedure for accreditation by AQU Catalunya, as laid down in the [Guide to obtaining a quality label for undergraduate and Master's programmes, within AQU Catalunya's accreditation process](#).

Acronym Description

AQU	Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
CAIP	Institutional and Programme Review Commission
CAR	Research Assessment Commission
CIC	Inter-university Council of Catalonia
CLiC	AQU Commission that dealt with tenure-track and collaborating teaching staff
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for the external Quality Assurance of Higher Education
INQAHEE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LUC	Law 1/2003-LUC, 19 February, on universities in Catalonia
REACU	Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
RUCT	Spanish Register for Higher Education (institutions, degrees and awards)
SAR	Self-assessment report
IQAs	Internal quality assurance system and quality and information security management system
IQA	AQU Catalunya Internal quality assurance and information security management system
ToR	Terms of reference
VSMA	Framework for validation (ex-ante accreditation), monitoring, modification and accreditation

Subject: RE: Substantive Change Report: AQU - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
From: Secretariat <secretariat@aqu.cat>
Date: 21/04/2017 12:12
To: Colin Tüeck <colin.tueeck@eqar.eu>
CC: Giné Soca Maria <mgine@aqu.cat>

Dear Colin,

Thank you so much for your report. I have read carefully the decision of the Register Committee and I have found out that, unfortunately, there is a typing error in our Guide.

In the paragraph number 8 the Register Committee says: AQU Catalunya's Guide states that "As a general rule, the student shall belong to the same **HEI** as the institution assessed".

There has been a mistranslation of the Spanish Guide, approved by our assessment body -CAIP-, into the English version.

In the Spanish Guide: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_86049523_1.pdf, page number 8 already says: "*De modo general, el estudiante pertenecerá al mismo **sistema** de educación superior al de la institución evaluada*".

So, the correct sentence should be in English: "As a general rule, the student shall belong to the same **Higher Education System (HES)** as the institution assessed".

As you can verify in the external review report of the Law Faculty of San Martín de Porres University of Perú (2016), http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_18229913_1.pdf, page number 33, the student appointed by AQU Catalunya as a member of the external committee was Mr. Diego Alonso Pomareda Muñoz, student of the Law Faculty of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. So, this student was not from the same institution assessed. We are at your disposal in case we have to add more information or evidence (the appointment document of the student? etc.) so that the Register Committee can verify that AQU Catalunya complies with standard 2.4 as it is required.

We appreciate very much the finding of the Register Committee and I inform you that we have immediately changed the English version of our Guide to avoid another unwanted misunderstanding (http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_42766911_1.pdf).

Consequently, considering that it is a typing error, I would ask to the Register Committee, if it is possible, to amend the Decision report of 19 April 2017, in order to reflect that AQU Catalunya complies standard 2.4. I will be grateful if you could inform us about how to proceed to formalise our request.

Best regards, and thank you in advance for your help.

Maria Giné Soca

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